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BEAUMARCHAIS

AND HIS TIMES.

BEAUMARCHAIS

AND HIS TIMES.

SKETCHES OF FRENCH SOCIETY

IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

FROM UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS.

BY

LOUIS DE LOMÉNIE.

TRANSLATED BY HENRY S. EDWARDS.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

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BEAUMARCHAIS AND HIS TIMES.

CHAPTER XXV.

POSITION OF BEAUMARCHAIS BEFORE THE REPRESENTATION OF "THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO." — OPPOSITION TO THE PERFORMANCE. — BEAUMARCHAIS EXERCISING THE CENSORSHIP. — BEAUMARCHAIS AND THE PRINCE OF NASSAU.—A PALADIN OF THE MIDDLE AGES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

We have now arrived at the highest and most brilliant point in Beaumarchais' career. He has reached the apogee of his fortune, his celebrity, and his influence over public opinion. After having ascertained by his own experience of life the inconveniences of an order of things in which intelligence reduced to self-dependence can only assert itself by indirect means, he is about to compensate himself to some extent for the mortifications without number he has undergone in conquering a position which, while exposing him to the jealousy of his enemies, does not preserve him from their disdain. He is about to

attack the whole of society, and to make it admit the justness of his ridicule. He will be seen for a moment uniting in himself all the impulses of destruction or reformation which are agitating his century. With a boldness hitherto unknown, he will apply the dissolvent of irony to a form of society which is falling from decay, and with his cap and bells will open the road to more redoubtable destroyers.

We must, however, avoid exaggerating, as is often done, the revolutionary *intentions* of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," and consequently the aberration of a power which tolerated attacks of which the results have alone shown us the tendency. In the present day we judge Beaumarchais' work from the events which followed it, and we are too much inclined to exaggerate, either for good or evil, the significance of this comedy. In undertaking to combine in a single theatrical piece attacks upon various abuses and various social states which many authors before himself, from Molière to Lesage had attacked separately, and in conducting this attack with the audacious, and even licentious vivacity which characterised his talent, Beaumarchais was far from imagining that he was helping to prepare a general overthrow, and that society had reached such a degree of weakness that a comedy which was itself not very healthy, but which, like all comedies, assumed the power of curing, would become an additional evil,

and would contribute to carry off the patient. What is already known of Beaumarchais proves superabundantly, independently of what will be read further on, that he was not a very fierce revolutionist, and that the four or five first articles by which in the present day every constitution even of the feeblest description invariably opens, would have sufficed to satisfy his political temperament. Disposed to censure vanities, privileges, and abuses from which he had suffered more than once, he was certainly far from being disposed to push things to extremities, and to welcome with enthusiasm a social convulsion which was destined soon to go far beyond his ideas, and to overturn and ruin him at the very moment when he was approaching the age of rest, and only aspired to enjoy in peace the opulence which he had acquired so laboriously. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" wrote his comedy, then, with sentiments of a much less subversive description than is generally supposed by those persons who are unaware that he possessed at this epoch a fortune of several millions; he wrote with his eyes closed to the future, thinking only of the present pleasure of enjoying a new dramatic success, taking his revenge for the humiliations and acts of injustice from which neither his wit nor his riches had been able to secure him, of continuing with greater boldness the mission of Molière, of making the small laugh at the expense of

the great, and amusing the great themselves, while interesting their self-love, so that they should not recognise themselves in a somewhat exaggerated picture of the abuses of rank and fortune.

Society on its side, that is to say, the summit of the society, which Beaumarchais was attacking, was not more conscious than himself of the danger of his attacks. An estimable writer of the present day, after recalling Beaumarchais' well-known *mot*, "There is something more outrageous than my piece, that is, its success," expresses himself as follows: "We may add, that there is something still more outrageous than this success, which is the fact of the representation of such a work being authorised under a *régime* which was not one of liberty. A government which tolerates, which even protects such departures from its laws, and a society which allows itself to be thus ridiculed, which is even an agreeable subject of laughter to itself, declare in concert that they have no intention of lasting."* This is how we judge the acts of our predecessors after they have taken place, suppos-

* "Histoire de la littérature Française du moyen âge aux temps modernes," by M. Géruzez, p. 527. The exaggerated importance attached to this particular fact takes nothing away from the general merit of M. Géruzez's work—a work of much distinction, of a kind which presents numerous difficulties. As a *résume* of our literary history, it is in my opinion the most substantial, the best arranged, the most correct, and the most interesting which has hitherto been published.

ing them to have our experience and our ideas. When the patient is dead, and subjected to an autopsy, it is not difficult to recognise the gravity of his disease, and to point out his imprudence. Governments, like societies, always mean to last, but nothing is less extraordinary than to find them deceiving themselves as to the nature or intensity of the evils which affect them, or the dangers which threaten them. Official society in 1783 considered itself in no danger of death; in spite of some prophecies of a more or less sinister nature, which otherwise have not been absent from any epoch of our history, it lived a joyful existence and reckoned on a morrow with much more confidence than the official society of the present day. Convinced that it was quite strong enough to withstand a satirical comedy, even a very audacious one, it scarcely troubled itself more about the formidable pleasantry of "Figaro" than a noble of the middle ages troubled himself about the insolent remarks of the fool commissioned to amuse his leisure. It is so true that at this epoch every one was walking with a bandage over his eyes, unacquainted with the future, and unacquainted with himself; that the only man who took the sallies of "Figaro" in a serious manner, and who, not content with protesting, like Suard, in the name of "good taste" and "good manners," accused Beaumarchais

with indignation of "lacerating, insulting, outraging every order of the state, every law, every rule," was a man who three years afterwards was destined to do with the sledge-hammer what the author of "La Folle Journée" had done with the point of a pin. Mirabeau coming forward in 1786, as a defender of "the orders of the state and laws" of ancient France against Beaumarchais, is an example of one of those mistakes which give us a good idea of a situation that the father of the impetuous orator defined in his characteristic manner when he said: "The blind man's buff, carried too far, will end with a general topsy-turvy."

There existed at that time in all minds, even the most "advanced," such illusions in regard to the future, that at the commencement of this revolution, which was destined to appear in so impetuous and so unbridled a manner, at five years distance from the immolation of Louis XVI., October 9, 1787, we find Lafayette writing a letter to Washington, in which, after enumerating all the symptoms of the movement in preparation, he concludes as follows: "All these elements mixed together will bring us, *little by little, without any great convulsion,* to an independent representation, and consequently to a diminution of the royal authority; but it is an affair of time, and it will go on the more slowly from the fact that the interests of powerful men will put spokes in the

wheels."* It certainly was impossible to make a prophecy more completely at variance with truth. There is no occasion, then, to be astonished that, in 1783 and 1784, official society did not think it was committing a suicide in submitting with complacency to the murderous sallies directed against it by "Figaro." We must also somewhat diminish the surprise inspired by Beaumarchais' audacity in insisting peremptorily on the representation of his comedy, in *spite of all the authorities;* it will be seen further on how many persons, and even persons in authority, beginning with five censors out of six, came forward of their own accord, when once curiosity had been awakened in a society which wished to be amused at any price, to give powerful assistance to the author of the "Folle Journée," and help him to produce it on the stage. However, it must also be said that Beaumarchais met with an obstacle which in other times, or for another man, would have been insurmountable. At the beginning of 1782, one authority had decided that "The Marriage of Figaro" should *never* be acted, and this authority was the king. Sovereigns, even when they are not gifted with transcendent genius, are sometimes indebted to their elevated position for the power of seeing further than other men; they have also too

* *Vide* "Mémoires du Général Lafayette," published by his family, vol. 2, p. 209.

immediate an interest in the preservation of the power deposited in their hands not to trouble themselves too lightly about what seems likely to interfere with it. It was incontestable that "Figaro's" daring attacks upon courtiers, lettres de cachet, diplomacy, the censorship, &c., had been seen for the last twenty-five years in the books most in favour with the public; but it was the first time they attempted to force, *en masse*, the entrance of a theatre where they appeared in an animated, light, pointed form, calculated to make them penetrate every evening, like so many arrows, into the mind of an audience, which was being incessantly renewed. This danger had been already pointed out to Louis XVI. by the keeper of the seals, M. de Miromesnil, who was a decided opponent of the piece; but on the other side, as the king was at the time overwhelmed with solicitations in favour of the comedy, he wished to decide the question himself, and had the manuscript brought to him.

Madame Campan has preserved for us, in her Memoirs, the picture of this scene, in which Louis XVI., alone with Marie Antoinette, has "The Marriage of Figaro" read to him. After the famous monologue in the fifth act, the king exclaimed, "It is detestable; it will never be played. It would be necessary to destroy the Bastille, to prevent the representation of this piece being a dangerous anomaly. This man

laughs at everything which ought to be respected in a government." "It will not be played, then," said the queen, whose tone seemed to indicate a certain inclination for the piece. "No, certainly," said the king, "you may be sure of it."

Louis XVI., then, was decidedly opposed to the representation beforehand of "The Marriage of Figaro;" his opposition was shared by the keeper of the seals, who was supported in his hostility by M. Suard. It was this opposition, very formidable from the rank of the persons composing it, if not from their numbers, which by means of numbers had to be overcome. Beaumarchais manœuvred in such a manner that a moment arrived, when it may be said, almost without exaggeration, that all Paris, except the king, the keeper of the seals, and M. Suard, desired to see "The Marriage of Figaro" played, and desired this with an ardour of impatient curiosity, against which a government can do nothing, when this fever, taking possession of an idle and frivolous society, becomes its fixed idea, dominating and absorbing every other pre-occupation.

We have still to inquire how public curiosity could have been over-excited to such a point on the subject of a comedy, which in itself is not absolutely a masterpiece; here something must be allowed both for Beaumarchais' skill, and for his altogether exceptional position. If he had only been a writer of

genius, struggling against the will of a king, a minister, and a censor, his piece would never have seen the light, or it would have had to undergo considerable modifications; but he then held a position quite apart in the history of celebrated writers, which allowed him at the same time to make use of a number of very different influences. As this situation, strange as it was, furnishes a means of explaining his success in a struggle apparently so disproportionate, we must first of all endeavour to depict and characterise it by means of numerous documents which we have before us.

A popular writer, a clever financier, Beaumarchais, during the period of four or five years which preceded "The Marriage of Figaro," was moreover a species of statesman on a small scale, consulted secretly by the ministers. We have seen him, under the influence of the very marked favour granted to him by M. de Maurepas, obtain, to a certain point, the confidence of M. de Vergennes, and act incognito a somewhat important part in French politics, in connexion with the United States; but his intervention in public affairs was not confined to this isolated case; we find in his papers the proof that, whether he put himself forward, or whether he was invited to do so, he interfered often enough in questions of administration or finance. We find him, for example, in 1779, at the request of M. de Maurepas, deliberat-

ing with M. de Vergennes on a plan for re-organising the taxation, and having frequent interviews with this minister, who writes to him several letters on the subject of the plan in question, of which I shall only quote one.

"If you will come here, Sir, to-morrow, Thursday evening, at six o'clock, with your assistant,* we can have a long interview in continuation of the work commenced last week. I tell you beforehand that I shall have an adjunct who enjoys the entire confidence of our Mentor;† I wish him to be present because, in a matter of so great an importance, it is impossible to have the views of too many persons.

"With the pleasure I always feel, Sir, I repeat to you the expression of my sentiments, &c.

"Wednesday, March 17, 1779."

Beaumarchais writes on his side, in sending to M. de Vergennes, a Memorial on this scheme: "Monsieur le Comte, I have the honour to address to you a faithful account of our last conference: the necessity of copying my own notes myself, on account of the secrecy imposed, has prevented my sending to you until this moment. I have given an elementary form to this account, in order that when M. de Maurepas shows it to the king, his inexperience in affairs of so complicated a nature may not prevent him from

* This was, doubtless, some other financier, who was associated with Beaumarchais in this plan for re-organising the taxation, which was not carried out.

† The Mentor is M. de Maurepas; it is a title which M. de Vergennes often gives him in his letters.

understanding all its bearings." Further on, we find the minister Necker entering into communication with Beaumarchais, either on the subject of the transit of tobacco from America, or on the most economical means of supplying provisions to the French troops sent to the United States. Further on again, we find another Minister of Finance, M. Joly de Fleury, consulting Beaumarchais on a projected loan; elsewhere we find the Minister of Marine asking for his opinion, or commissioning him to superintend some financial operation relative to his department. Frequently Beaumarchais interferes himself, by means of various Memorials, in questions of general interest, such, for instance, as the "civil condition of the Protestants," for whom, in default of anything better, he contributes at least to obtain admission into the Chambers of Commerce. Certain towns, such as Bordeaux, excluded them still in 1779, when the finances of the state were directed by a Protestant.*

Sometimes, even by a rather amusing contrast, Beaumarchais, who was so often at open war with the censorship, finds himself invested with the func-

* While Beaumarchais is treating of serious affairs with the ministers, he always finds time for things of less importance. *Vide* Appendix, No. 17, a letter to M. de Maurepas in reference to a decoration for a mantel-piece, which Beaumarchais wished Louis XVI. to purchase for the Queen.

tions, not of an official, but of an officious censor. "Here, Sir," writes the lieutenant of police, Lenoir, to him in a letter dated December 19, 1779, "is a manuscript, for which permission to print is requested. I have not read it; I beg you to give me your opinion about it." It was a singular idea to transform into a censor a man who was so frequently censured. Beaumarchais' answer indicates a little embarrassment in the exercise of functions of this kind. The work submitted to him turned upon the American war, upon the subject of which he had himself written a pamphlet, which had just been partially suppressed. He replied to the magistrate, that he found nothing blameable in the work, full of "political pleasantry," which had been addressed to him, and that the censorship, "properly so called," ought not to prevent its publication. However, as he does not wish to be inferior to the austere part of censor, and as he acknowledges that the tone of the work in question is not in harmony with the gravity of the subject, he adds these lines, which are rather curious as coming from the pen of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro:"—"This work is wanting in that *patriotic decorum, so little known in this country, in which everything is made the subject of jest; present events are the sacred vases of politics; we should either be silent, or assume the elevated tone which inspires respect.* After this, Sir, you will take

whatever course appears to you the most just." It is seen from this that Beaumarchais has no vocation for the office of censor, and that he scarcely knows how to conclude.

On bad terms with M. Necker, in consequence of some disagreement on the subject of financial measures, and probably also from the natural unsuitableness between the well-known stiffness of the Genevese minister and the easy freedom of his own manners, Beaumarchais was most intimate with the rival and successor of M. Necker,* M. de Calonne, who appears to have had a very marked liking for him. The reader will, perhaps, be astonished to find—at the very epoch when one is accustomed to look upon Beaumarchais as a sort of factious person, battling with all the authorities, in order to obtain the production of a seditious comedy—the reader will be astonished to find M. de Calonne granting him, on the part of the king, a considerable indemnity, which he had long claimed in vain, while he addresses to him one of the kindest letters, written throughout in his own hand, and of which the date is valuable, for it precedes, only by three months, that of the first representation of "The Marriage of Figaro."

* In Appendix, No. 18, will be found an unpublished letter from Beaumarchais to Necker, after this minister first fell into disgrace. This letter appears interesting to us, from the very honourable sentiment by which it was dictated.

"Versailles, January 19, 1784.

"I announce to you with real pleasure, Sir, that the king, on the account I gave him of your application, of all the circumstances of your affair, and of your being in need of a new account on the indemnities which you claim, has consented that you should receive the sum of 570,627 livres, which with that of 905,400, that you have already received, will make the total of what the commissioners intrusted with fixing the amount of your indemnity, have estimated to be due to you. His Majesty approved at the same time of the proposition that the examination of your ulterior claims should be intrusted to five merchants, acquainted with maritime affairs, whose nomination, as proposed by me, he confirmed. You will receive without delay, the copy of the king's order, which will make you acquainted with their names.

"You make me experience, Sir, the pleasure it is natural to find in procuring justice, and satisfaction for a citizen who is equally distinguished by his zeal for the service of the king, and the interests of the state, as for his intelligence, his talent, and the charms of his wit. I am delighted to have this occasion of expressing to you the sincere sentiments which I have entertained for you so long, and with which I am inviolably, Sir,

"Your very humble and very obedient servant,

"DE CALONNE."

It was not only for his own advantage that Beaumarchais made use of his influence with the ministers, he was the patron of a host of petitioners; men of letters, artists, financiers, lawyers, actors, actresses, all addressed themselves to him. Whether he was pleading with M. de Maurepas for Marmontel, who requested a place, which I believe was that of

historiographer; whether he was undertaking the defence of the president Dupaty, his friend, before the keeper of the seals, against the cabals of some magistrates who had raised the Parliament of Bordeaux* against him; whether he was requesting M. Necker to come to the assistance of some banker in distress; or whether, pressed by the supplications of the La Reynière family, who are frightened by the wildness of one of their sons, he went so far as to solicit from a minister of the king's household, M. de Breteuil, the prolongation of a *lettre de cachet* against this maniacal and vindictive son; or whether, in fine, he had to use his influence for some artist with the nobles who then directed the royal theatres, Beaumarchais worked for others with as much ardour and persistence as for himself. I will only quote one instance of it, which will prove how little his letters of recommendation resemble those vague, indifferent, and meaningless letters, which are distributed daily by an influential man who is much occupied. Perhaps, also, the reader will find something to attract his curiosity, in the fact of Beaumarchais giving his patronage with a disinterstedness, which seems really sincere, to a young and pretty girl, who wishes to appear at the Italian Theatre, and assisting her, not only because she has

* *Vide* Appendix, No. 19, a letter from Beaumarchais about Dupaty.

talent, but because she is virtuous. The letter is addressed to M. de La Ferté, intendant of the "Menus," that is to say, at the head of the administration of the theatres, under the superintendence of the four first gentlemen of the chamber.

"Paris, March 16, 1782.

"When a recommendation is addressed, Sir, to a man so enlightened as you are, in favour of some one, it is necessary to account for it, so that he may perceive that one is not endeavouring to interest him about a matter of mere imagination. This I will endeavour to do, in recommending to you Mademoiselle Meliancourt, about whom I have already said a great deal to Marshal de Richelieu.

"What every one sees very well in her is an agreeable face, and a most charming voice; but what does not strike the multitude so much is her great musical talent, the fruit of long study, and the excellent education she has received. This advantage alone ought to obtain for her every sort of preference in a theatre; where forced to play and sing at the same time, the actor who is the best musician will always be the one whose comic talent will develop itself the soonest, because the musical idiom of which he makes use will never embarrass him. Accordingly, when I see an awkward actor or actress at the Italian Theatre, I say that they are either incurable fools, or persons who have no knowledge of music. Enough attention is not paid to this point.

"Some persons have said that Mademoiselle Meliancourt has but little voice, and as for me, every time I have heard her, I have strongly recommended her not to spoil her superb organ by forcing it, as is only too often the case at the Italian Theatre of Paris. There is not in all Italy a singer who gives half Mademoiselle Meliancourt's volume;

but as they are musicians they acquire a mastery over the orchestra, and do not suffer the accompaniments to cover their voices.* She should do this with the orchestra of Paris, then it will be seen that she has a voice of greater range than any on the stage. All that nature and education can give, Mademoiselle Meliancourt has received with profusion; nothing is wanting to her, but those things which an experience of the stage can alone teach her—carriage and delivery. I am much astonished that with everything which is necessary for becoming so useful to the interests of the Theatre, the Italian actors hesitate with respect to her. How is it they do not feel that as their moral existence depends much on the conduct of each, every time they can receive a person of good family, and irreproachable conduct, they acquire new rights to the esteem of honourable persons. Those actors at Paris, who are in good repute, and have talent, are her friends, live with us, and experience no inconvenience from a prejudice which their conduct does away with.

"Mademoiselle Meliancourt is of good parentage; her father had a very good place; having become incapable of work he found in his daughter a gentle support for his old age. I should not employ this argument if I were recommending her to Des Entelles. Young, and somewhat of a scamp, I consider him more disposed to corrupt young girls than to protect them because they are virtuous; but, to you, who have passed all that, and who understand my reasoning clearly, and feel its force, I take the liberty of recommend-

* This was true in the time of Beaumarchais, when it was sai that the accompaniment ought to keep up a "respectful conversation" with the singing (*fanno col canto conversazione rispetoza*); but this repugnance for noisy instrumentation has now undergone much modification.

† Sub-Intendant of the "Menus-Plaisirs."

ing Mademoiselle Meliancourt. I present her to your good offices as a charming singer, a good musician, and full of emulation to become an actress, moreover virtuous, of good family, and calculated to do honour to any enlightened man who will constitute himself her patron.

"What will she do, Sir, if she be not accepted! She has sacrificed everything to her filial affection by appearing on the stage. There is now no other calling for her in the world, and the existence of her parents depends absolutely on the success of her sacrifice. This will be quite enough, too much for you. Permit me to add, that I shall share her gratitude, and that I shall join this additional feeling to the sincere attachment with which you know

"I am, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The situation of Beaumarchais as a man of the world in the period which precedes "The Marriage of Figaro," would furnish matter for sufficiently numerous quotations, in which the son of the watchmaker Caron would be seen freeing his style from the crudities which sometimes appear in it, in order to compete, in grace and elegance, with a sufficiently large number of fair ladies. We will here again confine ourselves to presenting a single specimen of this mundane side of Beaumarchais' wit, and we select it as serving to characterise to a certain extent the manners of the time. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was rather intimate with the Marquis de Girardin, at whose house Rousseau had just died, at Ermanonville. The Marquis had

a son, a young officer, who was then called the Viscount d'Ermanonville, and who became at a later period one of the popular orators of the Restoration, under the name of Stanislas de Girardin. This young officer, when in garrison at Vitry, having heard of a song "plus que grivoise," which Beaumarchais had composed in his youth, and which was sung with success among sub-lieutenants,* desired to possess an exact copy of this masterpiece, and instead of applying for it, either to the author himself or to M. de Girardin, his father, which might still appear to us allowable, he took a course which in the present day seems rather strange; he wrote to the Marchioness, his mother, to beg her to procure him from Beaumarchais this not very moral present, and the Marchioness, who, to tell the truth, did not exactly know to what point the "levity" of this song was carried, hastened to transmit to Beaumarchais her son's request in the following note:—

"Wednesday.

"My son has written to me, Sir, for a song of yours *about women*. As one cannot do better than address the author himself to obtain the real one, I hope you will not refuse this satisfaction to a young man who desires it much. As it is directed, according to what I hear, against my sex, if you fear it would not be polite to address it to me, you will have

* It was the song entitled "Galerie des Femmes du siècle," which our friend Gudin did not fail to include piously in his edition of Beaumarchais.

the kindness to send it to him himself.* M. de Girardin has informed me of the pleasure he had of having you at his house for some days, and his regret at your stay having been so short.

"I have the honour to be your very humble and very obedient servant,

"B. DE GIRARDIN."

Now comes Beamarchais' answer.

"Paris, March 25, 1780.

"No, Madame la Marquise, I will not send your son the song you ask me to give him. He may wish for it because he is not acquainted with it; but I, who repent having composed it in a moment of ill-humour, when I was insane enough to wish to punish the whole of the fair sex for the levity of one coquette—in one of those moments so much at variance with the conduct of the Saviour, in which one would make the whole world suffer for the sins of a single person, I shall not open the heart of a young man to impressions unfavourable to those he ought to love and serve, after the king, all his life. The work of M. Thomas, Madame, in which the author has celebrated the virtues of the ladies, in two handsome volumes, is what you must send him.

"For the rest, as no one is a better judge of what is profitable or injurious to her son, than an excellent mother like yourself, I have the honour to address this song to you, one of the greatest errors of my youth. It is for you, Madame, to keep it from him or to let him have it. I wash my hands, among the innocent, of the evil which may result from it to the son, if the mother becomes the accomplice of my past fault, after I have made her the confidant of my present scruples. Nor shall I seek to excuse to you the

* "To M. le Vicomte d'Ermanonville, officer in the regiment of the Colonel-General in garrison at Vitry."

blasphemies of my song, with the guilty levity with which I did so formerly, when a lady who was incensed, asked me why I did not make songs about the men. 'Were they more perfect in my eyes?' 'The black defects of men,' I said to her, 'are only fit to be punished; those of women alone are charming to sing, sometimes even to share.' That was certainly the speech of a young man who was abandoned by God, and lost in licentiousness. In the present day, I am far from approving of such lax morality, and if I take upon myself to send you the song with all it has blameable about it, I do so as much to humiliate myself before you, for having committed the fault of writing it, as to give you a direct proof of the obedience and respectful regard with which, Madame la Marquise,

"I have the honour to be, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

There is another side of Beaumarchais' life at this epoch, which possesses interest not only in itself, but also as explaining the influence he could exercise at a given moment. He is not only a man who has a hold on the minister, who protects a great many petitioners, and who has very extensive connexions in society; he is also an opulent financier, who is thought more rich than he really is, and who gives or lends a great deal of money to all sorts of persons. His cashier, Gudin, states that twenty applications for money reached him, on the average, every day; and this can be accounted for. By continually speaking ill of him his enemies obliged him to speak well of himself. He was often obliged to make some display of his generosity. The consequence was, that the

public took him at his word, and that from all parts of France he was called upon to prove that he was not a boaster. Among the invitations of this kind there are some rather original ones.

"The devil take me, Sir," writes a young lieutenant to him, from Saint Brieuc, "you are a delightful man. I have just read your Memorials,* which have given me infinite pleasure. It is impossible to dispose of people more thoroughly. I have been told that you are very rich; well, the difference is, that I am not at all rich, and that twenty-five louis would make me very rich indeed. Then, in all conscience, in order to do things as pleasantly as you say them, you should send me these twenty-five louis; I will return them to you in a year, on the faith of an honest man. I can see you laughing and saying: 'Who is this madman?' and why so? you have plenty of money, as I presume, as for me, I have very little. I suppose you to be a benevolent man, who would rescue a poor devil from trouble by lending him twenty-five louis, which he is in a position to restore to you. What is there surprising in that? I have never seen you! Well, you ought to be more obliged to me for thinking you sufficiently generous to lend twenty-five louis to a man who wants them, and whom you have never seen. Do not amuse yourself at my expense, and send my letter to the superior officers of my regiment; you would make me wish for a hole to hide myself in, which at all events has never happened to me. But, no, I am convinced that you will do better, and that you will send me these twenty-five louis. Come, Sir, give me your hand, and let it be a bargain. I give you my word of honour that you enjoy in my mind all possible consideration and respect, joined to all the admiration of which

* These were the memorials against Goëzman, which this officer read rather late in the day, as his letter was written in 1780.

I am capable, because I know you by your works, and that I feel no regard for persons with whose name alone I am acquainted.

"THE CHEVALIER DE SAINT-MARTIN,
"Sub-lieutenant in the regiment of
"Aquitane (Infantry).
"Saint Brieuc, Brittany, August 24, 1780."

On this letter Beaumarchais has written, "Answered September 20, 1780." Unfortunately I cannot find the copy of his answer. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was original enough himself to be able to appreciate the originality of the request, and I should not be astonished if he had sent the twenty-five louis. When we find a sub-lieutenant, perfectly unknown to Beaumarchais, thus attacking his purse from the depths of Brittany, we can easily understand to what degree he must have been tormented by all the varieties of petitioners, borrowers, and all the unhappy beings with which Paris abounds. His papers are full of incidents of this kind. I will cite one out of a thousand, because it relates to a rather celebrated poet, and because Beaumarchais, who for the rest never mentioned it, even after the death of the man he had obliged with so much delicacy, appears in it worthy of the part of Mæcenas, which he was so fond of playing during this brilliant period of his life.

Every one knows Dorat, but every one does not perhaps know that this poet, whose name gives the

idea of a frivolous and careless life, died at the age of 46, a prey to the deepest grief. He was a weak man, but endowed with the most delicate sentiments. After having been in possession of a certain amount of property, want of order, vanity, and also accidents independent of his will, had reduced him little by little to complete ruin, and even to a still more painful condition, for he was crushed by a heap of debts, and with a heart proud enough to suffer mortally from it, he had not strength of mind sufficient to undertake a courageous struggle with fate. His health had gone, and he was pining gradually away, concealing as he best could, the mental anguish which was devouring him, beneath the paint, *mouche,* and ribbons of his character as "bard of the graces." It was then that his friend, Countess Fanny de Beauharnais—she who, according to Lebrun, "composed her face, but not her verses," who was, nevertheless, an excellent woman—after rendering to Dorat all the services allowed by her very limited personal resources, decided, without the knowledge of her friend, on applying to Beaumarchais, whom she did not know at all, and who was but very slightly acquainted with Dorat. She consequently wrote a very touching letter to the author of "The Barber of Seville," in which, after describing Dorat's distress, and informing him that a mutual friend would tell him more, she asked for a loan of

20,000 francs.* To lend 20,000 francs to a man completely ruined was to give them. Beaumarchais at first thought the sum rather large; the following is his first answer to Madame de Beauharnais:—

"Paris, March 20, 1779.

"Your letter, Madame la Comtesse, affected me deeply. Never did tender friendship paint its solicitude in a more touching manner. I know you, honour you, and I love you from this letter; but how you afflict me by asking for your friend assistance which it is out of my power to give! I esteem him, and think highly of his works; besides, I consider we ought to do as much good as we can in order to be as happy as our station will admit: such is my natural feeling, and the fruit of a whole life's reflexion. I hold to it without display, and careless of what men may say or think of me. Now let us return to your case, Madame.

"Your confidence excites mine, and I ought to speak without reserve. People are as mistaken about the easiness of my circumstances, as about all my other affairs. I am not a great capitalist, but a great administrator. The fortune of my friends, confided to my prudence, obliges me to be circumspect and scrupulous in the use of their funds; whence it follows that I can give a suffering friend 25, 50, or 100 louis, by taking them from the money which belongs to me in the business; but I can do no more without placing in my cash-box a sum in paper equivalent to the money I draw from it; and I know too well that poor people cannot give good equivalents for the money they borrow: that is just the reason why they are in want of it. It is therefore with much pain that I find it physically impossible to lend your friend the large sum he requires.

"As to those private loans which my sensibility has drawn

* This letter will be found in Appendix, No. 20.

from me incessantly during the last four years, the cursed reputation I have of being a rich man has caused such an accumulation of these demands, that it seems as if all the unfortunate people in the kingdom had agreed to oppress my heart, and to load it with unhappiness. I cannot open my letters without grief, as I am always sure to find in them the fresh misfortune of becoming acquainted with another sufferer, often without having it in my power to assist him.

"Such is my life: great labour, small rewards; an expensive station in life, little fortune, and an eternal circle of the most heart-rending correspondence with a host of poor creatures whose wants have become my own. If you have a friend who knows me well, he will tell you that this picture of myself and my position is the truest I can give you.

"However this may be, Madame, make this mutual friend come and see me; since he has deserved your confidence, he shall have mine. We will talk over M. Dorat's affairs; he will explain to me the nature of his wants, his fears, and his hopes, and when I am better informed on the subject, if I can assist him, believe me, Madame, that while burying with the most religious scrupulousness all that he wishes to be kept secret, I will overcome impossibilities in order that your confidence in me may not be totally useless to him.

"I have the honour to be, with the greatest respect, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

Just as Beaumarchais was finishing this letter, Dorat's new advocate, whom Madame de Beauharnais had announced without naming, entered; he was an officer of whom we shall have occasion to speak again, and who was one of his oldest friends. Beaumarchais then added a postscript to his letter, which allows us in some measure to follow the working of the good feeling which prompted him:—

"My friend Datilly came just as I was about to close this letter: his story pierces my very heart; I certainly cannot dispose of the 20,000 francs, which you require; but once more, if M. Dorat, who is slightly acquainted with me, is not offended at your having confided the secret of his misfortunes to me, get him to come and talk over it frankly with me, or deign to give me the particulars, and all my resources shall be at his service."

Madame de Beauharnais answered Beaumarchias that Dorat was in the country, and would go to him on his return. A fortnight passed; Beaumarchais wanted to leave Paris in order to arrange some business; he feared that Dorat's pride would prevent his calling on him, and, as impatient to assist an unfortunate person as another would be to avoid him, he wrote a second letter to Madame de Beauharnais, which seems to me to be the expression of a truly excellent heart. Let the reader judge for himself:—

"Paris, April 5, 1779.

"I have not seen your friend, Madame la Comtesse. Is he still in the country, or does he disapprove of the confidence you placed in me?

"It would be well for us to have a conference before my departure for Bordeaux, which will take place in a few days. He is perhaps ignorant of the courage and strength possessed by a sensitive man who has been tried by adverse fortune. I am that man, and, very different from those whose fortune has improved, I take pleasure in consoling the unfortunate who are deserving, and of restoring to them that spring, so necessary to the mind, which misfortune always unbends. Perhaps, by dint of thinking, I may have found some way of helping

him out of his distress. I do not know, but something tells me that I shall not be quite useless to him. I shudder when I think that one moment of despair lost the life of poor Mairobert, who had a thousand ways of amply redeeming his character from the bad effects of a sentence which was, perhaps, rather too thoughtlessly pronounced.* He asked to see me; he said he was in want of my advice. Without knowing what his trouble was, I wrote to him that he would always be welcome, for I had known him for twenty years as a wild fellow and brave man. The sentence of Parliament was suddenly passed; he killed himself. If he did not deserve the sentence, at any rate he was wrong in putting an end to his life. With courage and patience one can overcome everything; if he was guilty I forgive him: one cannot survive deserved shame.

"The present case is very different, but this Mairobert has darkened my heart. I do not like an unfortunate person to suffer without communicating his troubles. No one knows to what point the head in that state may be excited. Again, Madame, do send your friend, that I may see him, that he may hear me! And, if possible, we will succeed in saving him by uniting his efforts with mine.

"I have the honour to be, with the greatest respect, &c.,

"Caron de Beaumarchais."

At last Dorat went to this generous man, who so cordially offered his assistance; and from the tone of his letter to Beaumarchais, after their hearts had been opened at the first interview, we can appreciate the delicacy with which the author of "The Barber

* This Mairobert was a rather clever writer, invested with the functions of censor. Being implicated, says Grimm, in a dishonorable manner in a lawsuit relating to the Marquis du Brunoy, he opened his veins in a warm bath.

of Seville" knew how to encourage and assist those in whom he was interested.

"April 12, 1779.

"Monsieur et cher amie," wrote Dorat—"after your conduct towards me, allow me to address you by this title—what pleasure I have in assuring you that I left your house relieved of a great burden, penetrated with the greatest gratitude, and consoled for the first time in three years, during which I have been struggling inwardly, with the most painful courage, against all the crises of my position. You were, doubtless, the only person in the world who could free me from them. When your name was mentioned to me, I became tranquil. The same strength of mind which made you overcome all your enemies, has now become turned into pity for the unfortunate. I am proud at having discovered your virtues in the midst of your talents, which are at once so brilliant, so charming. I tell you all that my heart, which you have solaced and which yearns towards you, inspires me with. It is a pleasure for me to have cause for loving one I have always esteemed. You asked me the real state of my affairs. I owe nearly sixty thousand francs—for half I could get time allowed; but my honour, my rest, my health, my life indeed, require me to pay the rest in the course of a year or fifteen months, at different times. All the engagements I make with you shall be sacred: I would sign them with my blood. Madame de B., whose fortune will be considerable, will, if necessary, be security; and two interesting beings will offer to you, with tears of gratitude, two souls which make but one.

"Forgive the disorder of my letter and of my ideas; I am involuntarily moved whilst writing to you. I think, by dint of kindness, you have made me better than I was, and I certainly was not wicked—but let me confide to you the weight which oppresses and kills me." . . . . .

Then follows a detailed account of his debts; but the unhappy poet deceived himself: he hoped to clear himself by his labour, and he was dying. He offered his signature: it was of no value; that of Madame de Beauharnais was worth no more. Beaumarchais saw all this clearly; he asked for no signature: what he did was merely to soothe the last days of an interesting man who was dying;—he authorized Dorat to draw upon him from month to month for the sums he required. In ten months, the 29th of April, 1780, Dorat died. During these ten months Beaumarchais had given him, in sums of 25 and 50 louis, 8400 louis; and the cashier Gudin, after carefully adding up the sums, wrote on the poet's papers, in the terrible language of an accountant:—"*Dorat died insolvent, No.* 23." He was No. 23 of the Insolvent Debtors. These numbers go beyond the hundred in the papers of the author of "The Barber of Seville."

Beaumarchais, however, was sometimes tired of being the banker of so many poor literary men; he turned a deaf ear to them, and this was considered cruel. We know with what bitterness Rivarol loved to exercise his satirical vein on him; this is how the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" became acquainted with the Rivarols. The following letter is from the younger of the two brothers, who was also somewhat of a literary character, and who afterwards became field-marshal during the Restoration. At

the time at which it was written, the elder Rivarol had not yet published anything against Beaumarchais.

"Sir,—I have not the honour to be known to you, and yet I apply to you to beg you to render me an important service; which I am perfectly convinced you will not refuse me. You are oppressed and calumniated because you have met with success, and done good; envy has attached itself to you, it follows you as the shadow follows the substance; the multitude are against you, but there are some upright feeling minds who know how to do you justice, and I am of the number. You would not have so many enemies if you were without merit; insignificant men are ignored. Voltaire says somewhere, 'A few enemies make one miserable, but many are an honour.' Therefore, Sir, you ought to console yourself. What can you care for these little minds which cry out against you? With talents, philosophy, and fortune, are you not sufficiently revenged on them? For a long time I have spoken highly of you in the society I frequent. I have taken up young fops and old fools, who sought, without foundation, to depreciate you, and even to blacken your fame. I have succeeded in silencing them, by preaching the truth to them, and asking them continually whether they know M. de Beaumarchais, and if they had ever visited him. They dare not say, Yes.

"This is the way of the world, Sir; calumny is eternally distilling its poisons without precaution and without care. I myself have been its victim for having had some wretched verses printed in the public papers. A crowd of literary boys rose against me; they sought to torment me, and they succeeded, because I am violent and sensitive, and I have now abandoned this sad profession. I am going to follow that of arms, which I had neglected for the study of letters, and I will manage to distinguish myself as my ancestors did. I have

lately obtained some employment in the service of the States-General (Holland); my family resides in Languedoc, and I am to set out instantly. I have not time to write to them. At Paris I have many acquaintances, and but one friend, and this friend is not in easy circumstances, which is quite natural: friendship requires so perfect an equality; as Milton says, 'Among unequals no society.'

"In consideration of what I have confessed to you, I must beg of you to lend me twenty-five louis. If you refuse, you will cause me to lose a profession which may afford me those means of existence I am now in want of. I will give you my note of honour for this sum; and that you may not have the least suspicion about what I have said—as I have not the honour to be known to you—you would greatly oblige me by making inquiries of M. le Marquis de Bourzac, lieutenant-colonel of the corps I am about to enter. I shall require a year, Sir, to repay you this sum, and you may rely on my word. If you will allow me to have the honour to see you, you will soon learn to know me. My heart is always open, although to men it ought always to be closed; in spite of my youth, I have already experienced this. Allow me, Sir, to present you with a little poem which I published last year, and a tale which I have just had printed.* I have taken for my motto, 'Il vaut mieux faire des riens que de ne rien faire.'

"I am, with the greatest respect, Sir,
"Your very humble and very obedient servant,
"THE CHEVALIER DE RIVAROL.

"P.S.—The Marquis de Bourzac lives Rue Montmartre, near the Egoût; and I live Rue Neuve-St.-Roch, opposite the Rue des Moineaux."

* The date of the tale in question, called "Osman; or, Fatalism," gives us that of the letter, which is not dated: it was written in 1785.

It is probable that Beaumarchais was insensible to the eloquence of this letter, and did not lend the wished-for sum; for, dating from this time, the warm enthusiasm of the chevalier turned, in the person of his brother the count, into outrageous, pointed contempt; but what is curious is, that at the very time when the most celebrated of the Rivarols was attacking Beaumarchais most violently, another member of the family persisted in tormenting him with very pressing and frequent demands for money. This was no other than the actual wife of this charming Count of Rivarol, who, after having married the daughter of an English writing-master, abandoned her, and left her with a child and the more or less authentic title of Countess.* Among Beaumarchais' papers are the most lamentable missives left by this poor woman. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" revenged himself on the count, by giving from time to time a few crowns to the countess, which procured him the pleasure of comparing the sentimental prose of the wife with the bitter satire of the husband. The contrast is striking:—"I sought a man, Sir," writes the Countess de Rivarol, "and I found a god. I will but say with Pericles, 'Ah, my son, we were dying, if

* No one is ignorant that Rivarol's right to the noble title, and even to the name borne by him, was strongly contested in the eighteenth century. We have not studied the question sufficiently to say whether there was foundation for this or not.

not dead!' My pretty little creature cannot yet understand me. Grant my maternal affection the pleasure of presenting him to you one of these days, that he may stretch out his pretty little hands to you as to his God and his Saviour." While Beaumarchais was supplying the wife and child of Rivarol with bread, the latter wrote against him the celebrated parody of the "Recit de Théramène," and thus did their actions differ.

Every one must agree that Beaumarchais was not ill-natured, for he had only to circulate Madame de Rivarol's letters to reduce the husband to silence.

By the side of the literary people who besieged Beaumarchais for money, were several noblemen. With these Beaumarchais was sometimes obstinate; for these great people often required sums of money which were in proportion to their rank, that is to say, enormous. No one can have failed to hear of Count du Lauraguais, one of the most remarkable eccentricities of the eighteenth century, who combined in himself all the tastes, fancies, talents, and follies possible; who could dissert marvellously well on the state finances, but conducted his own very badly, and wrote so much on every subject, that each of his phrases was regularly followed by a series of etcetera. Count de Lauraguais had for some years been very intimate with Beaumarchais, whom he familiarly called "*my dear friend.*" At the time of

"The Marriage of Figaro," a very violent pamphlet was circulated against the author, which was generally attributed to Count de Lauraguais. If there is any foundation for this opinion, the explanation of this pamphlet would naturally be found in the last letter from Beaumarchais to the count, in answer to a letter from the latter. Having ruined himself in town, M. de Lauraguais was suddenly seized with a passion for the country. He addressed some powerful arguments about administration to his "dear friend," from the valley of Auge, and concluded by requesting him to lend him, or cause him to be lent, a hundred thousand francs. Beaumarchais, while skilfully warding off this insidious thrust, profits by the occasion to give his witty and hare-brained correspondent a lesson of good sense, which appears to me rather neatly turned, and which, accompanied by a refusal of money, must have been but moderately pleasing to the Count de Lauraguais:—

"You are like Robin, M. le Comte, *toujours le même*.* The same spirit of discussion, the same strength of reasoning, and the same grace of elocution. But what is the use of all this? Can you change events,—can you destroy the power of intrigue? And whatever you may say about administration,

* An allusion to the refrain of a slightly cynical song of Beaumarchais, but the wittiest of all he composed, which is entitled "Robin," which was much sung in the eighteenth century, and which friend Gudin has also transmitted to posterity.

will it not always be what is called *verba volant?* More unfortunate than yourself, I live quite as confined a life. The thousand and one contradictions surround me, and I walk heavily in the midst of a universal pressure and friction. Courage and enemies, these constitute my fortune. And you have need of a loan of a hundred thousand livres, and you perceive the possibility of getting it through your perilous assignments! You have forgotten Paris, then, and the insufficient mortgages, and the privileges always exacted, and the securities? &c. &c.

"Your father, to whom you do not grant as much wit as he has given you, which is very ungrateful, by the way, said to me the other day, rather a strong *mot* in reference to you, which applies to this Italian adage: '*Di de auro, ma fa, &c.*' 'He is as witty as possible,' I replied to him. 'I do not know,' returned he, 'what wit that can be, which always puts beyond the limits of propriety his fortune and his natural sphere. I have not heard from him for eight months: what is he doing?' 'Monsieur le Duc, he is cultivating his garden.' 'But, Sir, his true park was that of Versailles.' Oh, the devil, I said to myself, this man does not reason too badly. Your farmers, Monsieur le Comte, rob you in your presence; do you think they do not do the same in your absence? The Rue de la Harpe, and the Place Maubert, are indeed very dirty streets,* but in them we find noise, hackney-coaches, vendors of decrees; there ministers are overturned, who nevertheless remain firm on their feet; questions which have so long been interesting that they have at length become tiresome are discussed there; the paper is read, paragraphs are made, iron is forged, because it is

* In reply to a sentence in the Count de Lauraguais' letter, in which the latter, full of his new mania for agriculture, said to Beaumarchais, "Il faudrait être un usurier ou une c . . . pour préférer la rue de la Harpe et la place Maubert a la vallée d'Auge."

always red-hot, and for a very excitable brain like yours, plenty of movement would be better, perhaps, than the appearance and enjoyment of your valley. It is the pleasure of an old man, Monsieur le Comte! And if it is to be classed among the others, it must be confessed that agriculture is the first of insipid pleasures.

"M. de Sartines and M. de Vergennes often ask after you with interest; I reply: 'Alas, he cultivates his garden; and for the time, (as Louis XV. said,) Il s'occupe à *penser* fortement . . . ses chevaux.'*

"I have the honour to be, Monsieur le Comte, &c.,

"Caron de Beaumarchais.

"Paris, September 28, 1778."

However, if Beaumarchais refused to risk a hundred thousand francs by lending them to a hare-brained fellow, he liked well enough to lend them to men of rank in general. This formed for him a sort of *clientèle* of patrician debtors, who helped him sometimes to surmount the difficulties of his position; but if he liked to lend, he liked well enough, as a general rule, to be paid. When a nobleman, even though he were a prince, appeared to be positively destitute of good will, he called upon him rather sharply. It was to a summons of this kind that the

* An allusion to a well-known *mot* of Louis XV., addressed to this same Count de Lauraguais, who boasted "d'avoir appris en Angleterre à *penser*." This *mot*, by the way, is denied by the Prince de Ligne, who declares, in his "Souvenirs," that it was not made by Louis XV. Now Beaumarchais' testimony destroys the assertion of the Prince de Ligne, as his allusion is addressed to M. de Lauraguais himself.

following note from the Prince de Luxembourg referred:—

"I have not forgotten, Sir, the noble and polite manner in which you were kind enough to oblige me, and unless unfortunate circumstances had tormented me, my first care would have been to acquit myself of my obligation towards you; but, be convinced that in a few days I will myself call upon you with your money, and while thanking you for your politeness, will testify the regret I feel at having been so unpunctual, and assure you of the sentiments with which I have the honour to be, Sir,

"Your very humble and very obedient servant,

"THE PRINCE DE LUXEMBOURG.*

"October 9, 1783."

On the other hand, when a man of high rank pays punctually, Beaumarchais encourages him in this good habit by the most flattering letters. Thus he writes to the Count de Polastron, who returns him money he has borrowed: "Your letter, Monsieur le Comte, breathes the candour and chivalric virtue of our good ancestors: I am really delighted at having obliged you;" while he writes to the Viscountess de Choiseul, who takes letters of rescision against her creditors, and wishes to thrust him, he says, into this "Saint

* When we compare this polite note of the Prince de Luxembourg with the insolent note written twenty years previously, in exactly similar circumstances, by a person of slender nobility, named M. de Sablières—a note which we quoted in its proper place—some idea may be formed of the change which took place during those twenty years in Beaumarchais' position.

Bartholomew," "When a person has thus taken a clear leap over all honourable proceedings, one must not be astonished, Madame la Vicomtesse, at no further relations existing beyond strictly legal ones."

Of all Beaumarchais' aristocratic debtors, the most original, beyond contradiction, is the Prince of Nassau-Siegen, representative of the Catholic branch of the house of Nassau. A comedy might be made out of Beaumarchais' relations with this prince and the princess his wife, who was not less eccentric than her husband. These relations of very close friendship lasted more than ten years, and the numerous evidences of it, which remain in the papers of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," present the elements of a picture of manners, which we will content ourselves with merely sketching. All the survivors of ancient France who have left us their *souvenirs* of the period preceding the Revolution—M. de Ségur, the Duke de Levis, the Prince de Ligne, Madame Lebrun, &c.—all agree in representing the Prince de Nassau-Siegen as one of the strangest characters of his time. "He was," says M. de Ségur, "a true phenomenon in the midst of a time and country in which the effect of a long civilization has been to give to all minds a uniform resemblance." "The Prince of Nassau," says the Duke de Levis, "had the greater number of those qualities which enter into the character of heroes—their enterprising disposition,

prodigious activity, love of glory, and a sovereign contempt for life. He sought out opportunities for distinguishing himself, and these opportunities did not fail him; however, he only left the reputation of an adventurer, and during his life had more celebrity than consideration." We can already recognise some analogy, which will help to explain the intimacy between Beaumarchais and the prince, whose life we will first of all sum up. The Prince of Nassau had through his grandmother, Charlotte de Mailly, aunt of the Duchess of Châteauroux, French blood in his veins; his origin was even thought to be completely French, as the legitimacy of his father, although acknowledged by a decree of the Parliament of Paris, had been contested, and denied in Germany by the Aulic Council. Thus Nassau found himself, from his youth, a German Prince recognised in France, rejected in Germany, and deprived of his princedom. At the age of fifteen he had enlisted in a French regiment as a volunteer; at eighteen he was a captain of dragoons, and he first attracted public attention by sailing round the world with Bougainville. In his travels he had had famous duels with tigers and lions, which had procured him the surname of "the tamer of monsters;" and on his return he had been appointed colonel of the royal German regiment (cavalry). Although he had a preference for residing in Paris or Versailles, he led the life of a Paladin of the

middle ages, always in quest of adventures and warlike enterprises. Wherever there was fighting in Europe he was sure to be found; at one time, commanding a floating battery at the celebrated siege of Gibraltar, he was seen to quit his burning boat last of all, and to swim to the shore with a smile on his lips under a hail of cannon balls: at another time, in the service of Russia, with flat-bottomed boats he destroyed a Turkish squadron at Oczakow, or dispersed a Swedish fleet in the Baltic. Cavalry or infantry soldier, general or admiral, he sought with equal ardour every kind of combat on both elements, and this warrior of fabulous daring, this "tamer of monsters," who was otherwise tall and personally well formed, "had," says Madame Lebrun, in her "Souvenirs," "the mild and timid air of a young lady who is coming out of her convent." This was the heroic side of the Prince of Nassau: his comic side consisted in an absolute impossibility to appreciate the value of money, which fell through his fingers like water, so much so, that this hero, the most essentially "cracked" of all heroes, divided his life between dispersing fleets, routing battalions, and flying terror-stricken before creditors, process-servers, and bailiffs, who did not leave him an instant's repose.

It was by this weak side that the Prince of Nassau had attached himself to Beaumarchais, as to a guardian angel destined to preserve him from the only

kind of danger which he feared. It was Beaumarchais who had to pay the most dangerous creditors, to make the others wait, to revise the fantastic accounts of some, to guard against the snares laid by others; in a word, to extricate his hero from the infernal band which was always attached to his steps.

The intimacy between Beaumarchais and the Prince had commenced in 1779; the following was the occasion. As there was some idea at this time of invading England, Nassau, who had already the command of a regiment of cavalry, had, moreover formed a body of men called the "Nassau Legion," and had attempted with his ordinary intrepidity a *coup de main* upon the island of Jersey. The French Government having renounced its project, the prince requested that the volunteers who had been formed by him might be incorporated with the king's troops, and that he might be paid for them, the money being destined for repaying the expenses of equipment, which he had advanced, or rather, for which he had run into debt, and for indemnifying the officers of the corps for their expenses. The Minister of Marine fearing that the money, if given directly to the Prince of Nassau would disappear as usual, to the detriment of the creditors of the legion, had commissioned Beaumarchais to superintend the liquidation, and to advance the necessary sums by instalments, taking care

to pay the creditors before indemnifying the prince. The situation of Beaumarchais was a delicate one. Nassau, constantly harassed by personal creditors, was perpetually asking for money. Beaumarchais, while giving him a little, endeavoured to make him understand that it was necessary, first of all, to pay the creditors of the legion, and profited by the occasion to give this hero, from time to time, some lessons in domestic economy.

"My prince," he writes to him, under date of August 1, 1779, "I have the honour to remit to you a *rescription* of 6000 livres. You must not be displeased with me if I imitate good parents, who economise on the pleasures of their children in order to liquidate their important debts. Many persons think it wrong, even now, that I should take upon myself to set aside, for your wants, 500 louis, which, if paid over, they say, to the Treasurer of the Navy, would have been in consequence of their opposition reserved for paying them, in preference to your personal orders. It is certain that they are right in this respect. Will you permit me to ask you also, my prince, why you have a courier who costs from eighteen to twenty louis, for a purpose which can be equally well attained by the transmission of a letter for thirty sous? Either you pay very slight attention to your expenses, or your wants are not so pressing as you say; and I am but the sad echo of this reflection, which may strike you as much as it did me, when it was made before me.

"If you find me somewhat more austere, my prince, than my reputation as a lively man seems to comport, attribute it only to the serious and genuine interest which I take in your troubles; they require all the care, and the most continuous

attention, on the part of those who are labouring to free you from them.

"I place myself among the number of these zealous labourers, while assuring you of the profound respect with which I am, my prince, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

These first relations between Nassau and Beaumarchais had soon brought about an intimacy which went on increasing, and the prince had accustomed himself little by little to look upon his friend as a sort of guardian, and, above all, as a treasurer who had been given him by nature: "The cash-box of M. de Beaumarchais," said the guardian of this cash-box, Gudin, "had become that of the prince, who went to it for everything he wanted." "My dear friend, deliver me from my creditors; they overwhelm me, and turn my head. . . . . My dear Beaumarchais, I recommend my affairs to you, as you promised to look to them, and I beg you to be certain that the friendship I have sworn to you will only finish with my life." Such is the ordinary refrain of the innumerable letters from the Prince de Nassau to the author of the "Marriage of Figaro." The latter gives himself up with an inexhaustible complaisance, mingled, however, sometimes with ill-humour, to this part of treasurer and guardian, which the Princess of Nassau contributes, for her part, to render very difficult, for she is as much "cracked" as her husband.

She was a Polish princess, who had been married to Prince Sangusko and divorced. Although Poland is a Catholic country, it is known that divorce is tolerated there. The Prince of Nassau was anxious to have his marriage recognised by the Archbishop of Paris; and he was so much accustomed to make use of Beaumarchais in everything, that it was he again who had to plead in this affair, and who transmitted to the prelate the request of the prince, supported by himself. I regret to have been unable to find Beaumarchais' plea in reference to the question, but the reader will perhaps not be sorry to meet with the answer of the austere prelate, Christophe de Beaumont, to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," pleading for a divorced princess:—

"Paris, September 13, 1780.

"I send you, Sir, my answer to the letter with which the Prince de Nassau has honoured me. You will be kind enough to transmit it to him. I will not conceal from you that this answer is a negative one. In spite of my desire to enter into the views of the prince, I could not have countenanced his marriage without acting contrarily to the principles of the Latin Church, which recognises no cause of divorce, and especially against the principles of the Gallican Church, in which there has been no instance of such marriages. Besides, in France there is a perfect conformity between the civil and ecclesiastical laws on the subject of divorce.

"Nothing can be added to the sincerity of the sentiments with which I am, Sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

"+ CHRISTOPHE, Archbishop of Paris."

In spite of the refusal of the Archbishop, the marriage of the prince, in consideration of its having been contracted in Poland, was recognised none the less at the court of Versailles, and his wife received as Princess of Nassau. "This couple," says the Duke de Lévis, "were well matched. The princess was a tall, thin woman, who had some remains of beauty. Without being perfectly straight, she showed some elegance in her figure; her manners were noble and polished; but she had more imagination than judgment. Her thoughts were unconnected; and, like the majority of Polish women, her heart was better than her head." This princess, in fact, threw money away, as we have said, with the same facility as her husband. Like her husband, she adored Beaumarchais, and like her husband she made too free a use of his cash-box. "I cannot conceive," writes the author of "The Barber of Seville" to the august couple—doubtless his patience had been almost worn out that day—"I cannot conceive how two persons so witty as yourself and the princess can continue to combine the most lamentable distress and the most reckless prodigality." The distress, in fact, sometimes goes very far: out of two hundred letters from the princess, there are certainly a hundred scrawled in an almost illegible handwriting, the object of all of which is to make an appeal to the purse of friend *Bonmarchais;* the princess, by the way, could never

succeed in writing the name of her friend correctly. The following are some specimens of these letters from a princess:—

"It is a long time since I have seen you, my dear *Bonmarchais*, and you are about to read the proof of it: it is that I am again without a sou. Send me some louis by the bearer, my friend, if you wish me to dine to-morrow."

Another one:—

"My dear *Bonmarchais*, I am in despair; but I must positively go to-morrow on business to Versailles, and I have not the smallest crown. Send me, if you can, some louis."

Variation on the same theme:—

"My dear *Bonmarchais*, here is the breakfast sent me to-day by my *maître d'hôtel*; see whether it is easy to digest.* M. de Nassau went to him, and asked him for his account. We must manage to talk over it, and to prolong the discussion until we are able to pay him. In the meanwhile, my friend, send me what you can. Adieu; pardon me if I torment you almost as much as I am tormented."

Friend *Bonmarchais* scolds, preaches economy, and always ends by sacrificing himself with sufficiently good grace. It is seen that he has a liking for these two personages, not only because they are prince and princess, but because they are agreeable, because they appear, moreover, to feel a sincere affection for him, and take a very lively interest in all his tribulations.

* It was doubtless some letter from the princess's *maître d'hôtel*, refusing to support her any longer at his expense.

The Princess, who must not always be judged by her importunate letters, often exhibits wit with a certain varnish of eccentricity which gives piquancy to it. Thus she writes to Beaumarchais *à propos* of the Abbé Sabathier, whom she does not like, and who has rendered services to her husband: "How much I love to be grateful towards you! how much it torments me to owe such a feeling to him! You are going to be angry. I do not hate him, but I cannot esteem him: I look upon him as a great child, and I scarcely like even little ones, except Eugénie.* Moreover, this man gives me the idea of imperfection, of weakness, and when I see this spider as it were beneath my heels, it makes my blood run cold. I am too frank, perhaps, but with you I have never thought otherwise than aloud."

The Prince, on his side, offers rather amusing points of originality, such, for instance, as setting out for the wars, and leaving his wife to deal with his numerous and insupportable creditors. If the Princess takes it into her head to write to him about his affairs, just as he is going up to the assault of Gibraltar, he himself addresses to Beaumarchais the following lines:—

"My dear Beaumarchais, it is agreeable enough, when one has a regiment of cavalry and a corps of infantry in France,

* Beaumarchais' little girl.

to come to Spain and command one of the floating batteries which are to open the gate of Gibraltar;* but tell Madame de Nassau, I beg of you, that it is ridiculous to consult me as she does about all my affairs. I have given her a very general procuration, because I leave everything to her. If she requires advice she has only to ask you: it will be more valuable than mine. Mind you tell her that I shall not send any answer in future to those parts of her letters which speak of business affairs. Adieu, my dear Beaumarchais. Believe me, no one is more attached to you than myself.

"NASSAU.

"July 25, 1783."

It was, indeed, rather hard for a hero to be pursued by stamped paper beneath the very fire of the enemy; but, on the other side, the poor Princess did not know where to turn her head. The Prince had estates in Flanders, which he offered for sale: unfortunately, there were law suits which prevented these lands being sold. The Princess had also property in Poland, which she sold, and which enabled her to pay a portion of her husband's debts; but the gulf was frightful and difficult to fill up. She exclaimed loudly, and referred all these annoyances to friend *Bonmarchais,* in whose papers we thus find the most varied types of the prince's creditor under the ancient *régime,* from the most civil and complaisant, true personifications of M. Dimanche, to the most over-

* This attack is known to have failed; but it was conducted in part by the Prince of Nassau, with rare intrepidity.

bearing, who talked philosophy, and would serve execution on a hero as if he were a simple mortal.

In the meanwhile, the Prince was covering himself with glory at the siege of Gibraltar. The King of Spain granted him the rank of grandee; but it appeared that this honour necessitated the spending of money: the Prince, as usual, had none; and also, as usual, the Princess, who had no more, applied for some to Beaumarchais. The latter, who had already furnished the sums necessary for the warrior's equipment, caused himself to be pressed a little. However, he was magnanimous:—

"Although I am horribly pushed," he writes to the Princess, "I am going to transmit to him at Madrid a thousand crowns more from the bottom of my purse, and you can write to him by to-morrow's post, that they are at his orders with the same banker at Madrid who supplied him with the former funds; I cannot suffer that, while he is covering himself with glory and endeavouring to repair his position, the embarrassments of ordinary life should be a most melancholy obstacle to him."

The Princess, who loved her husband passionately, was profuse in her thanks.

"What shall I say to you, my dear friend?" she writes to Beaumarchais; "how am I to express to you all my gratitude, and on what occasion could I feel more, than when you come forward to assist all I have dearest to me in the world? I send him your letter; I need not make him feel all he owes to you; he has a heart like mine, and knows you as well as myself."

The author of "The Marriage of Figaro," who has the inventive faculty, and who would be the more delighted to see the Prince pay his creditors, from the fact that his highness owes him a great deal of money, points out to his illustrious friend an ingenious means of profiting by the admiration felt by the King of Spain for his brilliant courage. The Prince, who has already been round the world, is to tell his Majesty that he wishes to perform the voyage again, and is to ask him as an only favour, for free entry for two vessels and their cargoes to all the ports of the Spanish colonies. This permission having been obtained, the Prince is to have recourse to the King of France, and to beg him to lend him two vessels to sail round the world in a second time, and to manage by this rather out-of-the-way course to pay his debts. These two favours having been obtained, Beaumarchais is to exert himself to find a company of merchants who will undertake to supply the two vessels with merchandise, and to advance to the Prince 500,000 francs. Nassau adopted this skilful combination with enthusiasm. The King of Spain granted the favour requested. It only remained to obtain the two vessels from the King of France. With this view, the Prince addressed to Louis XVI. a long memorial on the state of his affairs; he solicited a decree of protection from his creditors, set forth the plan which was to enable him to pay his debts, and in favour of

his military services requested the loan of two vessels. The most curious thing in this Memorial, after the combination for rescuing a hero from his creditors, without costing anything to the state, is that in terminating his petition the Prince of Nassau invokes the testimony and support of Beaumarchais, "who is willing," he says, "in consequence of his attachment for me, to give all his attention to the entire settlement of my debts." And Beaumarchais supports the Prince's petition to Louis XVI. in the following note:—

"If the testimony of a man of honour can give some weight to the facts set forth in this Memorial, I attest that since the marriage of the Prince of Nassau-Siegen, through the greatest sacrifices on the part of the Princess, his wife, both of her lands and of her diamonds and other property, the Prince has paid nearly one hundred thousand crowns of his debts.

"I certify that all the money granted by his Majesty for paying the debts of the Prince, in connexion with his campaign of Jersey, which money passed through my hands on the invitation of the Count de Maurepas and M. de Sartines, was entirely applied to paying the creditors who had furnished supplies for this campaign, without a crown having been applied to the personal use of the Prince.*

"I certify that there is still due, on this campaign, to different creditors, the sum of 280,000 francs; for the payment of which the tranquillity of the Prince, and very often my own, have been disturbed.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

"May 10, 1783."

* It has been seen above, that this assertion was not, perhaps, rigorously exact; but it has also been seen that Beaumarchais had done all that was possible for it to be so.

The Prince's petition had at first been received by the new minister of marine, M. de Castries, who promised the two vessels; but the Prince having had a quarrel with the minister, the affair miscarried. Nassau, always avoiding his creditors, started for Poland, where he distinguished himself in the service of King Stanislaus Augustus, arguing with heavy sabre cuts in the Diets against the Czartorisky party. "Before any understanding was come to," he writes in allusion to a deliberation, in the Polish style, "there were three hundred and four killed and several of them wounded; that is how we pass our time, and what liberty means: every one has his opinion, and maintains it. However, you see that kings are right everywhere when they desire it." When he was not fighting in the Diets, the Prince occupied himself in getting "The Marriage of Figaro" performed by the lords and ladies of the court, and shared with the King of Poland the functions of stage-manager. "They have taken into their heads to assert," he writes from Warsaw, December 15, 1785, to Beaumarchais, "that as I have witnessed more than ten rehearsals, and always at the author's side, I ought to supply his place and treat the company here, as I have sometimes seen him treat that of the Comédie-Française."* You see, my dear Beaumarchais, that my

* This quite agrees with the tradition of the Comédie-Française, which I have from M. Regnier, who has it himself from Baptiste and

part is not the easiest to play; accordingly I do not pretend to render it as well as that of the Countess Almaviva will be rendered by the Countess Tyskiewicz, whom you saw at my house at Paris. My wife has the part of Susanna; Sophie, who has very much grown, that of the little Page, which she plays very well; M. de Maisonneuve, who acts with less coldness than Dazincourt, and quite as much intelligence, has the part of Figaro; Count Almaviva is played by M. V . . . . (name illegible), who has a noble deportment and all that is requisite for rendering the part satisfactorily. The king, who comes to the rehearsals, and who takes the greatest interest in the piece being well played, said yesterday at supper time, 'I would give a great deal for M. de Beaumarchais to arrive here to-night.' You can understand that my wife and myself joined in chorus (after having got up "The Marriage of Figaro") at Warsaw; the Prince went into the service of Catherine, beat the Turks and Swedes, and while Europe was resounding with the fame of his name, kept up with Beaumarchais a correspondence, in which the latter recalled from time to time to his glorious friend, "placed," as he says, "at the head of the warriors of Europe," the

Duparay. "The actor's art," says M. Regnier, "found in Beaumarchais an appreciator of a very correct but very difficult taste. Duparay used to affirm that he was punctilious, nervous, and that he even lost his temper at the rehearsals."

necessities of actual life, and reminded him that it would not be amiss "to let his creditors see at least a few crowns."

"My Prince," he writes to him, "your horses, which were seized in the possession of the Duke de Lauzun, are not sold, and are eating themselves up. Nor has the money for the sale of Villers come in. I do not send you all your arms, which the unhappy armourer Toupriand left with me, when I advanced the money for taking them out of the Mont-de-Piété, because this armourer has placed an opposition in my hands, which cannot be raised until all his accounts with you have been liquidated. You asked me for a good surgeon, as the trade you pursue renders such a man indispensable to you; I send you this useful surgeon, at the same time as your useless valets. . . . I send you back your diamonds, of which I have not made use, as there is too much difference between the value the jewellers, the second-hand dealers, and the Jews, assign to them, and that attributed to them by yourself. . . . I was unable to pay the bill of exchange which the Princess drew on me from Warsaw, because I had no more money at liberty after all I had advanced for you. . . . However, you have your military successes, which are consoling to my friendship; a great man in petticoats who governs Russia—this hero's head on a handsome woman's body,* has not failed to seize the opportunity of making you contribute to the triumph of her arms. I congratulate you again on her august good will towards you. I have added up all the corps-d'armée which you are going to join. They

* These lines, written in 1786, are somewhat hyperbolical, considering that, at this epoch, Catherine was fifty-seven years old. Her rather diminutive figure had been invaded by a sufficiently ungraceful *embonpoint;* but Beaumarchais saw the Empress from a distance.

come to 470,000 men, according to your letter. With such forces the universe might be taken. Like a preux chevalier, you have her portrait; you will cry to her from afar, 'Lady of my thoughts, I am going to fight for you.' Fly, then, to Constantinople; but, *above all, do not get killed.* This is all I ask of you, and the future is your own. Adieu, my Prince.

"I am, with inviolable attachment, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The reader will comprehend the vivacity of this exclamation—*do not get killed!* which is repeated in several of Beaumarchais' letters to the Prince of Nassau, when he knows that his warrior, who was celebrated for his rashness, was at this moment both the friend of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," and his debtor to the amount of 125,000 francs. Beaumarchais, for the rest, shows himself a very obliging creditor; for whether he considers that too much pressing would not in any way advance him, or whether it be a result of his friendship, I find him writing, as follows, to the Prince of Nassau, at St. Petersburg, under date April 25, 1791:—

"As the dearness of the exchange, which you mention to me, my Prince, in your last letter, as a reason for my consenting that you should postpone the payment of my claim, has not prevented you from paying persons who had obliged you with a zeal which was much less lively and less disinterested than mine, it would appear to me to be the effect of some displeasure, of which I am ignorant, if I were not aware that I am the man on whose easy disposition you have always

reckoned the most. You have too much honour for me to feel at all anxious; you will pay me when you think you ought, and are able to do so without interfering with your comfort. The atmosphere of liberty has not destroyed my sensibility. I am like Robin, '*toujours le même*,' and I should like to love you with the disinterestedness of a sylph.

"Receive the salutations of the Cultivator,

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

After the death of Beaumarchais, the cashier Gudin states that the claim of his patron on the Prince of Nassau having been reduced, no doubt by instalments, amounted to the sum of 79,858 francs. Was this debt paid by the Prince, who survived Beaumarchais a sufficiently long time, or must this *Paladin of the middle ages* be ranked among *the insolvent debtors?* This last hypothesis appears to me the most probable. However this may have been, from what precedes, the reader will be better able to catch the true physiognomy of Beaumarchais' existence at the period of "The Marriage of Figaro," and will understand what a variety of resources he could, when necessary, employ in order to get a piece played, in spite of Louis XVI., the keeper of the seals, and M. Suard.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO."—TACTICS ADOPTED BY BEAUMARCHAIS TO OVERCOME THE OPPOSITION OF THE KING.—HIS ALLIES AT COURT AND IN THE SALONS.—FIRST REPRESENTATION OF HIS COMEDY.

"THE Marriage of Figaro," which was not to be played for the first time until the 27th of April, 1784, was completed by the author, and received at the Théâtre-Français toward the close of 1781.*

* That such was the case is shown by a letter from Beaumarchais to Necker (already cited); by an unpublished letter of Sedaine's, who had been present at a first reading, given at Beaumarchais', in September, 1781; and by a letter from Mademoiselle Fanier, *soubrette* of the Théâtre-Français, who writes to Beaumarchais, on the 11th of October, 1781, to demand the part of *Susanna*, which the author wishes to give to Mademoiselle Contat; to whose style, however, Mademoiselle Fanier objects that the part is by no means appropriate. Mademoiselle Contat did, in fact, ordinarily act the *jeunes premières*, or "first young ladies," but the acute perception of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" led him to believe that the character of Susanna, as he had conceived it, would be admirably performed by Mademoiselle Contat; and, as an author is at liberty to distribute the "parts" of his piece at his own pleasure, and without regard to the precise "line" for which the actors are engaged, he persisted in his choice, which proved to be most fortunate both

If we believe an unpublished letter of Beaumarchais', stating to the minister of the king's household, M. de Breteuil, the vicissitudes which his piece experienced before reaching the point of representation, the earlier readings of it must have taken place without the author's knowledge.

"As soon as the actors," writes Beaumarchais, "had accepted by acclamation my poor 'Marriage,' which has since had so many opponents, I begged M. Lenoir, (the Lieutenant of Police,) to appoint a censor; at the same time asking him, as a special favour, that the piece might be read by no other person, which he readily promised; assuring me that neither secretary nor clerk should touch the manuscript, and that the piece should be read in his own cabinet. It was so read, by M. Coqueley, advocate; and I beg M. Lenoir to place before you what he retrenches, what he objects to, and what he *approves of*. Six weeks afterwards, I learned in society that my piece had been read at all the *soirées* of Versailles; and I was in despair at the complaisance, *perhaps forced*, of the magistrate, in regard to a work which still belonged to me; for such was certainly not the austere, discreet, and loyal course, which belongs to the serious duty of the censor. Well or ill read, or maliciously criticised, the piece was pronounced detestable, and without my knowing in what I had sinned, for they expressed nothing according to the custom, I saw myself before the inquisition, and obliged to guess my crimes, while considering myself tacitly proscribed. But, as this proscription of the court only

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for the success of his piece and for Mademoiselle Contat, whose talent was already recognised, but whose brilliant reputation dates especially from the representation of "The Marriage of Figaro."

irritated the curiosity of the town, I was condemned to readings without number. Whenever a party is discovered, a second is immediately formed. . . . ."

It seems evident that, throughout the foregoing passage, Beaumarchais makes special allusion to that reading of the manuscript by the King, of which mention is made by Madame Campan, and of which the author would have known; and this places that reading at a period slightly anterior to that which Madame Campan herself appears to indicate. At the commencement of 1782, the question, therefore, stands thus: the King has read the manuscript; declares the piece *detestable* and *un-actable;* many persons about the court, probably begin by joining in chorus; and Beaumarchais undertakes to contend against what he calls the "proscription of the court," (being unwilling to specify more precisely, because he already has some warm partisans at the court,) by exciting the curiosity of the town, with readings skilfully managed. It soon became a question, who could obtain the favour of hearing him, whether at his own house or in the most brilliant saloons, giving these readings of his piece, which, we are assured, he executed with remarkable talent. "Every day," writes Madame Campan, "persons were heard to say, 'I was present, or I shall be present, at a reading of Beaumarchais' piece.'"

I have before me the manuscript which served for

these drawing-room readings. It is much more elegant than that of the Comédie-Française. The leaves are carefully joined by rose-coloured ribbons, and the whole covered with a wrapper of card-board, upon which Beaumarchais had written, in tasteful letters, in imitation of printing, this title, *Opuscule comique.* A singular title for a voluminous comedy in five acts;—a sort of lever which contributed to overthrow the ancient *régime.* On the first leaf of this manuscript is a sort of preface, never published, and entitled "Introduction to the reading;"—that is to say, that before reading his piece, Beaumarchais began by reading a page, which we should certainly not quote—for it is somewhat free, and of questionable taste—did we not know (as the reader will speedily learn), that the greatest and even the most virtuous ladies, the Princess de Lamballe, for example, or the Grand Duchess of Russia, afterward Empress, and also—Heaven forgive me! bishops and archbishops, permitted Beaumarchais deliberately to read to them this strange preface:—

"Before commencing this reading, ladies, I wish to narrate to you a circumstance which has come under my observation.

"A young author, supping once at a certain house, was requested to read one of his works, which was much spoken of in society; and even cajolery was employed to persuade him. But he resisted. Some one became angry and said to him, 'You resemble, Sir, an accomplished coquette, refusing to each that, which at heart, you burn to accord to all.'

"'Apart from the coquette,' replied the author, 'your comparison is more just than you imagine—the fair and ourselves having often the same fate, of being forgotten after the sacrifice.' The lively and urgent curiosity excited by the announcement of a new work, resembles somewhat the ardent desires of love; and when you have once obtained the object of your wishes, you force us to blush for having had too few attractions to retain you.

"Be more just, or ask nothing. Our portion is the labour, while you have only the enjoyment, and nothing can disarm you. And when your injustice breaks forth, what a melancholy similarity between us and the fair. Everywhere the criminal is timid; here it is the injured one who dare not lift his eyes; 'but,' added the young author, 'that nothing may be wanting to the parallel, after having foreseen the consequences of my proceeding, inconsequent and feeble like the fair, I yield to your prayers, and am about to read my work to you.

"He read it; they criticised it; I am about to do the same; —and you also."

Curiosity once thoroughly aroused by the first readings, Beaumarchais knew well how to practise the very coquetry which had furnished him this somewhat free parallel. He replaced his manuscript in the drawer, declaring that it should not be taken out again;—fearing, as he said, to offend the King, by making more extensively known a piece which his Majesty disapproved. It was necessary to entreat him, to supplicate him; it was also necessary that the rank of the persons who so besought him should be such as to protect him from all dissatisfaction in high

quarters; whence it followed that even the most distinguished personages obtained this favour only on condition of asking it at least twice. The Princess de Lamballe, for example, the friend of the Queen, experienced a violent desire to have "The Marriage of Figaro" read at her house. She despatched an ambassador to Beaumarchais. He was one of the greatest nobles of the Court—the eldest son of Marshal de Richelieu, the Duke de Fronsac; one of those degenerate scions of the French aristocracy who have especially contributed to render Beaumarchais' comedy so redoubtable;—for to an insolent fatuity, and to all the vices of a debauchee by profession,* the Duke de Fronsac united a great poverty of wit and extreme ignorance. It was especially upon him that fell with singular force and appropriateness the famous phrase, "*You have taken the trouble to be born,*" for he had certainly never cared to take any trouble in addition thereto. But, as Beaumarchais had said in his piece, "It is only small men who are afraid of small writings," the Duke was particularly anxious not to pass for a small man, and he patronized "The Marriage of Figaro to his utmost."

* Every one knows that the poet Gilbert directed the most courageous of his satires against an infamous and unpunished action, attributed to this young duke. As for the Duke de Fronsac's wit, Madame Campan assures us that the Queen, comparing it to that of her father, which in itself was nothing extraordinary, said: "It is distressing to find so small a man in the son of Marshal de Richelieu."

We annex, *literally,* one of the Duke de Fronsac's notes to Beaumarchais. Those who have read in the correspondence of Voltaire, a letter in which the author of "Zaire" expresses to the Duke de Richelieu his regrets at having been unable to undertake the education of the duke's eldest son, will easily perceive that his "education" had, in fact, left something to be desired. Besides which, if the reader will be good enough to remember that the Duke de Fronsac was a colonel at the age of *seven years,* he will better understand that the duke could not have had the time to study orthography! Here is his letter:—

"You caused your door to be closed against me yesterday, Sir, and that is not too pleasant; but I do not, for all that, bear malice enough not to tell you of the negotiation with which I am charged as towards you, by Madame la Princesse de Lamballe, who would be delighted to hear 'The Marriage of Figaro,' of which the highest praises have been uttered to her as well as to me; and she proposes to you to come on Wednesday next to Versailles. I will give you some dinner, and afterward we can go to her house. I am delighted that peace is re-established with the *Comédie,** and beg you to inform me whether you accept my proposition. Adieu! You know the sentiments with which I shall always be, Sir, your very humble and obedient servant,†

"THE DUKE DE FRONSAC."

* Alluding to the suit of Beaumarchais against the actors, which gives us the date of this note. It must be the commencement of 1782.

† The peculiarity of this letter consists so entirely and exclusively

Beaumarchais, doubtless, refused a second time to give an audience to the Duke de Fronsac; for here is a second letter of his, unsigned, which is no more dated than the other, but which is evidently a consequence of it, and in which he returns to the charge with the same faults of orthography. It appears useless to us to reproduce them again.*

in its orthography, that no idea of it can be conveyed to the reader, except by transcribing it in the French.—THE TRANSLATOR.

"Vous m'avez fait fermer votre *portte* hièr, Monsieur, et cela n'est pas trop bien; mais je n'en garderai *pourttant* pas assez de rancune pour ne pas vous parler de la *négotiation* dont je suis chargé vis-à-vis de vous par Mme. la Princesse de *Lambal* qui aurait grande envie *d'enttendre le Mariage de Figaro* dont on lui a fait les plus grands éloges ainsi qu'à moi, et elle vous proposerait de venir mercredi prochain à Versailles. Je vous donnerais à diner, et *ensuitte* nous irions chez elle. Je suis *enchantté* que la paix soit *réttablie* avec la Comédie et vous prie de me mander si vous *accepttez* ma proposition. Adieu, vous *conoissez* les *senttiments* avec lesquels je serai *toujourr*, Monsieur, votre très-humble et très-obéissant *servitteur*,

"LE DUC DE FRONSAC."

* If we have pointed out the faults of orthography committed by the Duke de Fronsac, we have done so because they are marked by singular eccentricity. We do not pretend, however, to attach to the fact itself more importance than belongs to it. Whoever has read many autographs of the eighteenth as well as of the seventeenth century, must have remarked, among persons well educated, and sometimes even among authors by profession, a sufficiently great indifference about conforming, when they write, to the rules universally recognized in the printed works of their time. I suspect that we must explain this orthographical anarchy, (which I have remarked especially in the eighteenth century), by the insufficiency of grammatical studies, at

"Versailles, Friday.

"I am much flattered by the honour which your good lady did me in closing your door against me, and the more so that, unhappily, I recognise my unworthiness, which gives me much concern.* However, that is not the question.

"I should be very sorry to cause you to break your word to him whom you call your patron;† but it appears to me,

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least as regards the men; for, as to the women, it is certain that their grammatical instruction was more neglected than at present. However, taking the fact in its most general aspect, it could, in my opinion, be explained by the very marked preference which was then given to conversation over reading. Every one knows, in fact, that a strict regularity as to orthography is acquired, by the greater number, less by principles than by routine. The daily reading of the newspapers almost suffices, in itself, to habituate every one to write the words in the same manner. In the eighteenth century people conversed more and better than now, but I think they read much less. Beaumarchais' orthography, for example, by the side of phrases where rules of some difficulty are observed, presents singular inadvertences. Thus, he always writes *abé* for *abbé*; which may be explained, perhaps, by saying that he did not associate much with abbés; it will be seen however, subsequently, that he cultivated the acquaintance of a few of them. But his habitual familiarity with the theatre did not prevent him from writing *actrisse* (instead of *actrice*); and although he enacted the *negociant* in the four quarters of the world, he never fails to style himself *negotiant*.

* It appears that Beaumarchais' people did not distress themselves greatly at refusing admittance to the Duke de Fronsac, since this was the second time that such a thing occurs. The allusion to Beaumarchais' wife resembles conceit under the mask of modesty. Madame de Beaumarchais being very pretty, this Duke (who, by the way, had nothing of the attractions of his father) almost appears to suppose that his personal appearance had been considered dangerous.

† Beaumarchais had alleged, no doubt, a reading promised to some other great lord, of whose name I am ignorant.

from what you have told me, that you have no day fixed. Therefore, I propose to you, (if you do not wish to refuse the Princess de Lamballe and myself, her message-bearer,) to accept for Wednesday or for Saturday, and to let me know on Tuesday or Monday, if you can, what day you will appoint. Until your answer, I shall give none to her. You say that I have been your adversary in comedy; I do not deny it, but it appears to me that I was not altogether wrong, and that you have come very nearly to my views. In reality it would be unjust to have more bad feeling against me than against the actors; that would not be generous. Therefore, I await your answer; and am, I assure you, without malice, as you ought to be. Adieu."

Beaumarchais finished by yielding to the entreaties of the Duke de Fronsac, speaking on the part of the Princess de Lamballe; but it is evident that he waited to be pressed.

The arrival at Paris, in the spring of 1782, of the Count and Countess du Nord (the Grand Duke of Russia, afterwards Paul I., and the Grand Duchess), appeared to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" an excellent occasion for attempting a vigorous stroke against the disapprobation of the King; and here again Beaumarchais so arranged that his movement was anticipated. The Baron de Grimm, half philosopher, half chamberlain, undertook to acquaint him that the august travellers had a great desire to hear a reading of this piece, which formed the subject of conversation throughout Paris. The following letter is not signed, but it is by the Baron de Grimm,

with whose handwriting we are acquainted. Moreover, the draft of Beaumarchais' answer to the Baron leaves no doubt as to the authenticity of the letter.

"It is necessary that you should know, Sir," writes Grimm to Beaumarchais, "that to-day, at dinner, there has been a great deal of conversation at the house of the Count du Nord concerning 'The Marriage of Figaro;' that the count and the countess have shown a great desire to know this piece, and that it has been agreed that they should propose to the author to come on Sunday, about seven o'clock in the evening, and to have the goodness to bring his piece with him and read it. Prince Yousoupoff undertook this proposition, as having long been an acquaintance of the author's. I think that this reading ought not to be refused, and that far from prejudicing the intended representation, it may considerably advance it; because if, as I do not doubt, the piece produces the effect which it is accustomed to do, the auditors will only be the more encouraged to take some proceedings in favour of the representation. I thought it my duty to inform you of the state of things; but, I entreat you very earnestly, Sir, not to compromise me, for I have been but a witness in repeating my intelligence. No duty has been intrusted to me; and it is only the interest that we both take in the thing, which requires that you should be acquainted with what passes.

"I beg you to accept my homage, &c.*

"Friday, May 24, 1782."

*. It can be seen that Grimm is a prudent man, who does not like to be compromised; but since the Baron takes of himself so lively an interest in "*the thing*," that is to say, in the representation of "The Marriage of Figaro," we ask ourselves why, when this representation takes place, the same Grimm, in his "Correspondence" addressed to Germany, speaks in so ironical a tone of the *intrigues* to

This reading, including, no doubt, the preface which we have quoted, had a great success. The re-

Which the *illustrious* Beaumarchais had recourse in order to have his piece acted? We ask ourselves why the Baron de Grimm says—"The event has justified the opinion which M. de Beaumarchais had of his powers; an opinion which we have never ceased to share, *with all the respect which the depth and sublimity of his resources can inspire.*" This disparaging tone does not at all agree either with the letter we have just cited, or with a preceding letter which we do not cite, in which Grimm congratulates himself with much warmth upon having been present at a reading of "The Marriage of Figaro," at the author's own house. Can it be that Beaumarchais had failed in the respect due to this Baron of the Holy Empire? Far from it; for after the reading at the house of the Count du Nord, Beaumarchais writes to Grimm, on the 27th May, 1782, an elegant letter, which commences thus:—"Monsieur le Baron,—The least I can do is to offer you my first thanks, for it is to you that I owe the reception, full of kindness, with which their Imperial Highnesses have deigned to honour my grave person and my flighty production. Yesterday, again, at the reading, did I not see from the corner of my eye that you had the goodness to give to things, common enough, the importance of your approbation, which would have sufficed to elicit that of the august couple? . . . . On Saturday last M. le Comte de Vergennes said to me, 'There are few men whom I respect so much as the Baron de Grimm, and his opinion upon your work will decide my own.'" Certainly, one could not be less sparing of flattery! Why, then, does the Baron speak with so much disdain of a thing about which he has just been seen to interest himself so kindly? Apparently, the Baron felt the necessity of commencing his account as *a man of quality;* for when he has once paid this tribute to his own vanity, and entered upon the analysis of the piece, he displays, as usual, wit, good sense, and certainly more kindness than severity. Only the Baron of the Holy Empire could not decently avow to German princes that he had himself had his little share in "*the intrigues of the illustrious Beaumarchais.*"

membrance of this success has been preserved to us by a friend of the Grand Duchess, the Baroness d'Oberkirch, who was present, and whose interesting recollections of the eighteenth century have been lately published. Her work contains a sketch of Beaumarchais, which accords marvellously with that of Gudin, which we already know, provided always that the word *vaurien* (*i.e.*, scamp, or good-for-nothing), is taken in the sense in which the baroness probably used it, and which would have certainly been given to it by the sparkling Gudin. We cannot forbear reproducing this sketch, apologising at the same time to the shade of La Harpe for the disrespectful levity with which Madame d'Oberkirch makes him serve as a contrast to Beaumarchais. "In so much," says this lady, "as the pitiful mien of M. de La Harpe displeased me, in just so much, the open, intelligent, and perhaps somewhat bold countenance of M. de Beaumarchais charmed me. I was blamed for it. It was said that he was a *vaurien*. I do not deny it; it is quite possible; but he has prodigious wit, an undaunted courage, a resolute will which nothing checks; and these are great qualities."

Strong in the suffrages of the Russian Grand Duke, Beaumarchais decided to make a first movement with the keeper of the seals, in order to obtain the representation of his piece. The keeper of the seals received him as Beaumarchais himself received the

Duke de Fronsac; that is to say, he closed the door against him. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" then fell back upon the lieutenant of police, to whom he addressed the following letter; in which we see him make skilful use of the sympathy of the Count and Countess du Nord for his piece, while at the same time that he gives us some interesting and hitherto unknown details:—

"Sir,—I presented myself yesterday at the house of the keeper of the seals, whom you had promised to apprise of my purpose;—he refused to receive me. I beg your pardon for recurring again to a frivolous subject; but the Prince Yousoupoff, first chamberlain of the Grand Duke, has just left me. He renewed the request for my manuscript, in order that the Count du Nord might take it to the Empress.* It is impossible for me to send it until the piece has been played, for a comedy is not truly finished until after its first representation. Since the piece was submitted to the censorship, I have made great changes in it. It has had the good fortune to please the august couple of our illustrious travellers. Since then, I have submitted to a much more rigorous test, for I have read it at the Marshal de Richelieu's, before bishops and archbishops, who after being infinitely amused by it, have done me the honour to assure me that they would publicly declare that it did not contain a word by which morality could be offended."†

* The Empress Catherine II., who, after having proposed to publish Voltaire, offered also, it appears, to have acted in her dominions a comedy interdicted in France. And, in truth, the boldness of Figaro, like that of Voltaire, was attended with but little danger in Russia.

† This is very strong! One would be anxious to know who were these "bishops and archbishops;" but, unfortunately, Beaumarchais

"The keeper of the seals having closed his door against me, I can only address myself, Sir, to you, who are at the head of the police of the theatres.

"The Grand Duke and Grand Duchess so openly avow their desire to see the work represented, and they have expressed it to so many persons, that it is no longer possible to appear unaware of it. This refusal may appear, at length, to be very disobliging, and as for myself, it seems so much like a personal persecution, that I beg you to be pleased to give me the answer to the enigma, if you know it. I venture to believe that no citizen merits less than myself to experience such treatment.

"The actors, who have been requested to play the work, and towards whom the public (*the more healthy portion of which* is acquainted with it) have shown themselves most urgent for its performance, — have written to me that the 'turn' of the piece has arrived; and ask me for it most earnestly.

"I beg you, therefore, Sir, to have the goodness, in your capacity of magistrate, to inform me what answer I am to make to the Grand Duke, who well knows that my piece is not immoral, and to his august mother, who wishes to have it promptly. I annex the original letter of his grand chamberlain, which you will be so good as to restore to me. If the first examination by the censor was not sufficient, have the goodness to order a second, and a third. 'The Barber of Seville' had four in succession, for everything that

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does not tell us, although it is evident that such an assertion, made to the lieutenant of police, with an indication of the house where the reading had taken place, could not be a fable. The fact remains then, in the history of the manners of the eighteenth century, that the manuscript of "The Marriage of Figaro," (which was even more *free* than the printed piece,) found grace even in the sight of "bishops and archbishops."

happens to me is extraordinary. But observe that the keeper of the seals leaves this evening for the country, and that, if you have not his permission to-day, there will be another week lost at the least, while the Grand Duke has only a fortnight to remain here. I said to his chamberlain, that I was about to write to you again; and I do so.

"I shall have the honour, to-morrow, to proceed to renew to you the assurance of the respectful attachment with which I am, Sir, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

This letter brings us to the end of 1782. In June, 1783, Beaumarchais, who, it must not be forgotten, conducted twenty other affairs at the same time with this, seemed at one moment on the point of obtaining a victory over the King and the keeper of the seals, and of seeing his piece played at the theatre of the court itself. By the influence of, I know not whom, the actors suddenly received orders to learn the piece, "for the service of Versailles."* It was subsequently decided that it

* I find among the papers of Beaumarchais, in explanation of this incident, only the following lines from the unpublished Mémorial to M. de Breteuil:—"Some persons whom I honour, and whose requests I respect, having desired to give a *fête* to one of the King's brothers, insisted that 'The Marriage of Figaro' should be played on the occasion. The sole condition for which I stipulated was, that the piece (very difficult to perform) should be confided only to the actors of the Théâtre-Français. For the rest, I left everything to the pleasure of those who had requested the performance." I presume that this representation had been organised for the Count d'Artois, by M. de Vaudreuil, and the friends of Madame de Polignac, whom we shall presently see acting more openly.

should be acted in Paris, in the theatre of the hotel of the Menus-Plaisirs. Tickets were distributed to all the court; the carriages already thronged about the entrance of the theatre; when, at the very moment that the performance was about to commence, an express order arrived from the King, forbidding the performance of the piece, in any theatre or in any place whatsoever!.. "This prohibition by the King," says Madame Campan, "seemed an attack upon the public liberty. So many disappointed hopes excited dissatisfaction to such a point, that the words 'oppression' and 'tyranny' were never pronounced with more passion and vehemence than then, in the days which preceded the downfall of the throne." Madame Campan here attributes to Beaumarchais an insolent speech, often repeated since then, and which appears to me to be a fabrication. According to this lady, Beaumarchais said aloud in the very theatre of the Menus-Plaisirs: "Very well! Gentlemen! *he* will not allow it to be represented here, and I hope, for my part, that it will be played, perhaps in the very choir of Nôtre Dame." The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" had, I think, more tact and good sense, than to publicly utter a piece of coarse folly, which would have for ever prevented him from obtaining his object, when he was sure of doing so by continuing the system previously adopted.

Why had the King determined to prohibit thus, at the last moment, a representation of which he could not have been ignorant, as it had been prepared by the very persons who surrounded him? All that we find on this subject, among Beaumarchais' papers, is limited to the following passage in the unpublished letter to M. de Breteuil: "I really do not know what court intriguers solicited and obtained the express prohibition of the King against acting the piece at the Menus-Plaisirs; or rather, I think it unnecessary to repeat it to him, who knows it much better than I.* I again patiently replace the piece in my portfolio, waiting until another event shall draw it forth." In fact, another very soon did present itself; and this comedy, which we have just seen the King forbid to be represented, was played with his *permission* before the whole court, and the Count d'Artois, at the country house of the Count de Vaudreuil.

Contemporaries are sometimes very badly informed, or at least very uncertain in their recollections. Take, for example, Madame Lebrun, who was pre-

* In a letter to the Marquis de Thionville, on the subject of this incident, Beaumarchais writes: "We are endeavouring to ascertain who is the Galilean who conquered us on that day. Pending this rare discovery, which does not at all concern the Marshal de Duras (for he has not disdained to give his word of honour on the point), I remain silent before an order of the King, as it is right I should."

sent at this representation at Gennevilliers; and who says in her Memoirs: "Beaumarchais must have cruelly harassed M. de Vaudreuil to succeed in getting acted on this stage a piece which is so unseemly in every respect." The reader can judge which was harassed, M. de Vaudreuil or Beaumarchais. The latter, after the unpleasantness of the counter-order given so late at the Menus-Plaisirs, had gone to England on commercial business, when that same Duke de Fronsac, against whom he had already, several times, closed his door, presented himself at his house in Paris, and not finding him, left the following letter:—

"Paris, September 4, 1783.

"I hope, Sir, that you will not find it amiss that I should have undertaken to obtain your consent for 'The Marriage of Figaro' to be played at Gennevilliers; but it is true that when I undertook this commission, I believed you to be still in Paris. The fact is as follows: You must know that I have let, for a few years, my land and house at Gennevilliers, to M. de Vaudreuil. The Count d'Artois is coming to hunt there about the 18th, and the Duchess de Polignac, with her party, are coming to sup there. Vaudreuil has consulted me about giving them a play, for they have rather a nice room, and I told him he would not find a more charming one than 'The Marriage of Figaro,' but that the King's consent must be obtained. We *obtained it*, and I hastened off to your house, and was very sorry and astonished to find you so far away. The piece is well known, as you know; will you give your consent to its being performed? I promise to take the greatest care that it shall be properly arranged,

Count d'Artois and all his friends look forward to seeing it as a great treat, and certainly it would be a great step to getting it played, perhaps at Fontainebleau and at Paris. See if you can do us this favour. As for myself, individually, I wish it most earnestly, and beg you to send an answer as soon as possible. Let it be a favourable one, I beg, and do not doubt either my gratitude or the feelings of esteem and friendship with which I shall always be, Sir,

"Your very humble and obedient servant,

"THE DUKE DE FRONSAC."

The same day, or perhaps the previous evening, the Duke de Fronsac wrote to the Intendant of the Menus-Plaisirs, M. de La Ferté, the following note, which is also of some value:—

"St. Denis.

"Since my letter, dear La Ferté, and since one I have written, *une que j'ai ecrit*, to Des Entelles, and which he will receive this evening at Paris, the Queen has told me that the King consented to 'The Marriage of Figaro' being played at Gennevilliers about the 18th;* so pray tell Des

* This sentence of the Duke de Fronsac's proves that Madame Campan is like Madame Lebrun, and arranges things according to her fancy, for she says, in her "Memoirs"—"The Queen was much dissatisfied with all those who had *helped* the author of 'The Marriage of Figaro' to *obtain the King's consent* to his comedy being played at Gennevilliers." It is easy to see how little Madame Campan knew of the facts. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was in England, and consequently could not have tried to obtain the King's consent; and it was the Queen herself who transmitted the King's consent to the Duke de Fronsac, whence it follows that, in order to do what Madame Campan says, the Queen would first have had to testify her dissatisfaction towards herself. The Duke de Fronsac's letter seems to prove, on the contrary, that

Entelles to make all the arrangements necessary. If Beaumarchais is not at Paris, a courier must be sent to him, wherever he is, and the actors must be informed of it, and all must be done with the least possible noise. I shall be in Paris to dinner on Thursday. I told Des Entelles to ask Carline to dine with me that day, because I did not think 'The Marriage of Figaro' would be played; but let him ask Contat* instead, that we may arrange all about it. Good-bye."

While the Duke de Fronsac was sending after Beaumarchais, the Count de Vaudreuil, who was preparing his fête for the Count d'Artois and Madame de Polignac, was waiting impatiently for the consent of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." We have before us a note from him to the Duke de Fronsac, which we find among Beaumarchais' papers, apparently because the latter, fearing some ebullition on the part of the King, had obtained the whole of the correspondence from the Duke de Fronsac, that he might prove that he had only yielded to the solicitations of the courtiers. This

the Queen assisted in getting the King's consent in order to make herself agreeable to the Count d'Artois, to M. de Vaudreuil, and to Madame de Polignac.

* I think if Mademoiselle Contat had read this letter she would have felt but little flattered to find herself placed on the same level with Mademoiselle Carline, who was of doubtful reputation. It is worth knowing, too, that M. de La Ferté, intendant of the King's Menus-Plaisirs, was also intendant on this occasion of those of the Duke de Fronsac, who exercised the functions of first lord of the bedchamber instead of his father.

lucky circumstance enables us to observe closely what passed in those thoughtless heads which the revolution was about to strike, and to see with what blind impatience those giddy patricians aspired to be pointed out by "Figaro," to the contempt of the masses. Let us see, now, what the Count de Vaudreuil says :—

"Friday, Versailles.

"My dear Fronsac,—The parody of the 'Ami de la Maison' is much too gay to be played before very young women; the other piece is perhaps still more so in reality, but at any rate the expressions do not offend the ear, and it can be played. So, in case Beaumarchais' answer does not arrive soon enough, we will keep to the piece of Cailhava's and two well-arranged proverbs; but I have no doubt that the permission* will be obtained, and therefore we will postpone the performance for three or four days. Accordingly, it will take place on the 21st or 22nd. Will you kindly take upon yourself to tell the actors to hold themselves in readiness for that time? but, except in 'The Marriage of Figaro,' *there is no salvation.*† A thousand thanks, my dear de Fronsac, for the trouble you kindly take. I am conscious that it is for the ladies and the Count d'Artois, whose gratitude is equal to mine.

"Accept again the assurance of the warm friendship I have devoted to you for life.

"THE COUNT of VAUDREUIL.

"The first time I visit Paris, I shall go and thank Made-

* Beaumarchais' permission is here spoken of; the King's was already obtained.

† Does not this seem strange from M. de Vaudreuil's pen, when one thinks of the incontestable influence "The Marriage of Figaro" exercised in destroying the ancient social hierarchy?

moiselle Contat and Madame Raimont for the trouble they are kindly taking. If there are any other female characters in the piece, let me know, that nothing may be wanting."

Beaumarchais learned then in England that the piece which the King had prohibited, a few months previously, was to be acted before the court, and that they were only waiting for his permission. He returned immediately to Paris, and this time profiting by the circumstances made his own conditions. It was not exactly his object to amuse the court in secret, but to appear before the public and make them laugh at the court, which was a very different thing; provided, however, that one led to the other, Beaumarchais would be delighted to please MM. de Vaudreuil and de Fronsac. Only, before consenting to the performance at Gennevilliers, he *innocently* exacted that the favour of a new examination should be granted him; a singular request to begin with. "But," he was told, "your piece has already been read by the censor and approved of, and we have the King's permission." "Never mind, I must have a fresh examination." "I was found rather particular in my turn," he wrote to M. de Breteuil; "and they said I made difficulties merely because I was sought after; but as I was determined to settle public opinion by this new examination, I insisted on its being granted, and the severe historian, M. Gaillard,

of the French Academy, was named censor by the magistrate of police."

It was not a bad idea. On the eve of a court festival, when every one was anticipating the pleasure of seeing "The Marriage of Figaro" performed, what atrabiliary censor would have dared to stop this pleasure, and to quarrel with the powerful nobles who were to arrange the entertainments? And if, as was to be expected, the censor's decision was perfectly favourable, this would be another reason for permitting the public representation, which Beaumarchais intended to profit by. We already know, from a rather amusing extract, the person whom Beaumarchais called the "severe historian," Gaillard; the reader will not be displeased to meet the severe historian again, and to know what he thought of "The Marriage of Figaro." This is his account of it, which is rather short, and addressed to the lieutenant of police:—

"Allow, me, Sir, to inform you of my opinion with regard to the comedy entitled 'La Folle Journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro.'

"I have heard it read, and then read it myself, with all the attention of which I am capable, and I acknowledge that I see no danger in allowing it to be performed when corrected in two places, and when some *mots* have been suppressed, of which a malicious abuse, or dangerous and wicked application might be made.

"The piece is a very gay one; but when the gaieties, although approaching what are called *gaudrioles*, are not indecent, they amuse without doing harm. Gay people are

not dangerous, and state troubles, conspiracies, assassinations, and all the horrors we read of in history of all ages, show us that they have been conceived, ripened, and executed by reserved, sad, and sullen people. The piece is, besides, called 'La Folle Journée,' and Figaro, the hero of that piece, is known in the comedy of 'The Barber of Seville,' of which this one is a continuation, as one of those intriguers of the lower class, whose examples are not dangerous for any man of the world. Besides, I think that by rising up against certain things of little importance, as if they were dangerous, a value is given them, which they themselves have not, and fools or ill-natured people are inspired with a fear or suspicion of danger, which has no reality."

Then, after having proposed two suppressions, one of the word "minister," the other of a passage which was cut out, alluding to the judgment of Solomon, the severe historian, Gaillard, concludes thus:—

"This piece appears to be well written. The personages speak as they ought, according to their station, and I think it very likely to bring many spectators to the Comédie, and consequently, what it much requires, large receipts." *

* As I am anxious to be rigorously exact in everything, I must add, that this account, which in my opinion is very curious, as an evidence of the spirit of the time, appears in Beaumarchais' papers without a signature, and bearing only this indication written in his own hand: "*Copy of the censor's report on 'The Marriage of Figaro' given to M. le Noir by the censor;*" but what convinces me that this report is really by Gaillard is, that among the same papers are the originals of the decisions of the other censors, such as Coqueley, Desfontaines, Bret, who were successively commissioned to examine the work. The only one missing is that of Suard, the only one which was positively unfavourable, which concluded by

M. Gaillard's kind censure was not sufficient for Beaumarchais: he required still more before he would consent to the performance at Gennevilliers. "When the piece was again approved of," he writes in his unpublished memorial to M. de Breteuil, "I took the precaution of stating beforehand that it should not be played at the fête till I had the express promise from the magistrate that the French comedians might consider it as belonging to their theatre, and I can certify that this assurance was given me by M. Lenoir, who certainly thought all finished, as I might also have done."

To appreciate the diplomatic value of this passage, and the art with which Beaumarchais in his tenacity, full of ingenuity, knew how to bind people who inconvenienced him, and whom he could not meet face to face, we must remember that he was now fighting against the express command of the King not to perform it in public, a command which the King consented to waive, but only for one day, in a particular house, and to please the Count of Artois and M. de Vaudreuil. Beaumarchais would not consent to this, without a formal promise that it should

condemning the piece, and a copy of which was probably refused to Beaumarchais. Consequently, the anonymous report we have just quoted can only be by Gaillard, whose approbation Beaumarchais often made use of, and which seems to be very well authenticated by his allusions to *history* and to *sullen people*.

be allowed to reach the public; but as he did not yet dare to go so far, and yet wished to go a step farther, he invented the fine periphrase we have just read, which became a sort of vague engagement contracted with him, and on which he depended afterwards to advance farther. On these conditions he granted at last the desired permission, and M. de Vaudreuil thanks him for it in the following note, which proves that he at least accepted the engagement as understood by Beaumarchais:—

"The Count of Vaudreuil has had the honour of calling on M. de Beaumarchais to thank him for his kindness in allowing his piece to be played at Gennevilliers. The Count of Vaudreuil has eagerly taken this opportunity of giving to the public a masterpiece they are awaiting with impatience. The presence of the Count of Artois and the real merit of this charming piece will at last overcome all the obstacles which retarded its performance, and consequently its success. The Count of Vaudreuil hopes soon to be able to come and thank M. de Beaumarchais in person.

"Monday, September 15, 1783."

Some days afterwards the entire court had the pleasure of attending the performance of a piece which the King had declared to be detestable and unactable. It is even said that the Queen would have appeared at Gennevilliers had she not been prevented by an indisposition. It is very probable, as Madame Lebrun relates, that the ladies complained of the heat, and that Beaumarchais broke

the panes of glass with his cane, and that this gave rise to the neat *mot*, "*qu'il avait doublement cassé les vitres*;" but, when Madame Lebrun describes him as intoxicated with joy, rushing about on all sides like a man out of his senses, she looks at him through the prism of the time that has gone by and of her own imagination, never doubting that instead of *cruelly harassing* M. de Vaudreuil as she believed, Beaumarchais had been contented to let him come round to him, to allow himself to be solicited and flattered by him, and to make use quietly of his influence.

In the same way, when Madame Lebrun, without saying so expressly, seems to imply that the representation at Gennevilliers had but little success, and when she tells us that *every one suffered from its absence of measure*, we are inclined to think that the authoress is substituting for her impressions of the moment those which are influencing her at the time she is composing her Memoirs. The "absence of measure," in whatever style it was found, had the effect, then, of amusing boldness. We have just heard the words of the *severe historian* Gaillard, who has given us the pitch of the general sentiment. However, the piece still contained details at the period of this representation at Gennevilliers, which must doubtless have shocked even those persons whose wild dispositions inclined them, like Gaillard,

to forgive a great deal for the sake of gaiety, "although approaching what are called *gaudrioles*." There were extravagant *gaudrioles* which are still to be seen in the manuscript of the Comédie-Française, and which were only suppressed by the fourth censor, M. Desfontaines, in a report dated January 15, 1784, so that we must suppose they were uttered in 1783, before the illustrious audience at Gennevilliers.* There were also in the monologue of the fifth act certain passages which made its incisive character still more marked. There were, doubtless, among the spectators of Gennevilliers some persons more scrupulous than others, who were in favour of maintaining the interdiction issued by the King; but altogether this brilliant audience declared itself enchanted with the piece, with the exception of some slight suppressions.

* Only imagine the most illustrious ladies of the Court listening to Figaro in the third act, when he says to Count Almaviva, on the subject of the latter's infidelities, and in allusion to the Countess:—"A sa place, moi, je ne dis pas ce que je ferais.—LE COMTE. Je te le permets.—FIGARO. Quelque sot.—LE COMTE. Je te l'ordonne.—FIGARO. Instruite de vos faits et gestes et prenant conseil de l'exemple, je vous solderais vos petits bâtards en un bon gros enfant légitime . . . . et puis cherche." In another place, in the first act, old Bartholo replied to Marceline, who conjures him to marry her, by a sentence which is certainly the *nec plus ultra* of that subtle and pretentious language which Beaumarchais applies sometimes to a coarse idea, as if he were endeavouring to combine Voiture with Rabelais: "J'irais," said Bartholo, "j'irais, grison apoplectique, agacer risiblement la mort avec les jeux printaniers qui donnent la vie! Vous me prenez pour un Français."

Such, in fact, from the period of the representation at Gennevilliers, was the theme of M. de Vaudreuil, who spoke openly in favour of its public representation, and now only occupied himself with procuring from Beaumarchais the sacrifice of a few phrases. As for him, the change which took place in his attitude indicated that he felt sure of conquering. Full of patience hitherto, beneath the royal prohibition, working slowly and skilfully to gain ground, he became impatient, pressing, almost imperious. It is evident, in fact, to any one who reflects a little, that from the day when Louis XVI. permitted the Queen, the Count of Artois, M. de Vaudreuil, and Madame de Polignac, to have the representation at Gennevilliers, he had put himself in a position in which he was unable to offer resistance much longer to public curiosity, now carried to its height by this very representation of which every one was speaking, and which was carefully kept up as a subject of conversation by Beaumarchais. Those who reproach Louis XVI. with having allowed "The Marriage of Figaro" to find its way to the stage, forget that under the ancient royalty the public was not absolutely driven like a herd; and that, if its influence sometimes disappeared in important affairs, it often showed itself in secondary or frivolous questions, with an energy which it would have been dangerous to resist. The speech attributed to Louis XVI.: "You will see

that Beaumarchais will have more influence than the keeper of the seals," proves, if it was ever uttered, that the prince had a correct notion of his own position. Meanwhile everything was contributing to increase the brilliancy of Beaumarchais' triumph. As the King could not make up his mind to allow the performance of a piece which he considered dangerous and immoral, he tried to delay it as much as possible, and resisted seven months longer.

The very day after the performance at Gennevilliers, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," behaving as if his cause was gained, had formally applied to the lieutenant of police for permission to have his comedy brought out. This officer had replied that the King's prohibition, given the day of the performance at the Menus-Plaisirs, was still in force, and that he must refer the matter to his Majesty. "Two months afterwards," writes Beaumarchais, in his unpublished letter to M. de Breteuil, "the lieutenant of police told me the King had deigned to reply that *he was told there were still some things* which ought not to remain in the work; that one or two new censors must be named, and that the author would be able to make the corrections more easily as the piece was long. Monsieur Lenoir had the kindness to add, that he should look upon this letter of the King's as countermanding the prohibition to play this piece immediately after its examination by the new censors."

The reader sees with what care Beaumarchais, as he advanced, fortified himself behind every portion of the ground he conquered. However, the final decision was still postponed. The third censor, who had been mentioned, had not performed his office; but the obstinate author was not the man to let himself be forgotten.

"Sir," he writes to the lieutenant of police, November 27, 1783, "if the multiplicity of your occupations makes you forget that I also have many, and that during the last three months I have gone fifty times from the Marais to your hotel, without having been able to speak to you more than five times, to obtain the most simple thing—a decision about a frivolous work—you would, perhaps, have compassion on the pitiful part I am obliged to play in this comedy. If you are required to load me with mortifications, I assure you I have drunk the cup to the very dregs; if a prohibition be laid on all that proceeds from my pen, why let me wait so long for the order, and deny me all means of knowing what I am to do?

"I entreat you, Sir, to be kind enough to return me my manuscript; this trifle has only become of value to me from the persistence which has been shown in making it the subject of a public wrong towards me, without allowing the public the means of judging of it for themselves.

"I do not doubt, Sir, that you, who have never shown me anything but kindness, regret the trouble which you have been obliged to cause me. But it is time there should be an end to this. No serious affair ever caused me so much annoyance as this piece—the wildest revery that ever entered my nightcap.

"The provincial and Parisian public overwhelm me with letters, to which I can give no reply. I do not know what to say to the actors, who torment me and reproach me with a

negligence of which I am guiltless. Pray let me see you this evening, on leaving the Bank of Discount, and in withdrawing from your hands this proscribed work to put it back in my portfolio, be assured that I am with the most respectful devotion, yours, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

This tone is evidently that of a man who feels he is supported by public opinion, and who knows very well that the government will not go so far as to have a rupture with him, and return his manuscript. The piece was at last given to the third censor, who made some modifications, and gave his approval. The King required a fourth, who made very few corrections, and gave his approval. He required a fifth. This one, Bret, gave his approval, without making any corrections. It is well worth having censors when they are themselves influenced by the public curiosity!* The report of the fourth censor, Desfontaines, who himself wrote for the theatres, contains some very curious passages. He examined the work very attentively, "which," he says, "I

* Among these five examinations of the censorship I do not know where to place the date of the sixth, that of Suard, the only person who completely interdicted it. I may add that, among Beaumarchais' papers, I found the proof of a very decided opposition from Suard, which continued, as every one knows, even after the performance; but I find nothing to prove that Suard was officially commissioned to examine the manuscript of Beaumarchais, who often speaks of all his censors. However, Garat, in his Memoirs of Suard, and I think Madame Suard also, in a little volume she published about her husband, assert the fact.

read four times, following the author sentence by sentence." He makes some slight suppressions; for example, the two licentious sentences we have quoted, and a passage against lotteries, which was in the monologue. As for the piece itself, he pleaded for it, and defended every character with an ardour not to be surpassed by Beaumarchais himself. He goes very far indeed, for, in the character of Susanna, finding rather an improper sentence, which the author himself changed in the last performance, he began by suppressing it. Afterwards he changed his opinion, left it untouched, and with a love of art very rare in a censor, wrote on the margin a "*mot* which is *unique, which it is impossible to replace, and which I leave.*" This *mot* was, in fact, so unique, that it is quite impossible for us to reproduce it.*

After having defended the piece to the best of his power, the censor concluded with the following declaration, in which there is some truth:—

* Phrases which were simply extravagant naturally found favour in the eyes of the censor. There were some remarkable specimens of this kind which were not suppressed until the last rehearsal. The actor Dazincourt tells us, in his Memoirs, what trouble he had to induce Beaumarchais to sacrifice one speech which he wished to retain. In the quarrel with Basil, in the fourth act, Figaro said to him: "Si vous faites mine seulement d'approximer Madame, *la première dent qui vous tombera sera la mâchoire et voyez-vous mon poing fermé? voilà le dentiste.*" (If you even look as if you were going to approach, Madame, *the first tooth that will fall out of your head will be your jaw and do you see my clenched fist? that is the dentist.*)

"I do not hesitate to add, that the performance of this piece may conduce to the advancement of the dramatic art; and, delicate as the censorship ought to be, about all that concerns decency, religion, and government, it ought to be quite as indulgent towards those passages which may be turned to the profit of morality. It is to the liberty which Molière enjoyed that we owe the morality in which his pieces abound. Would his characters be as energetic as they are, if he had been obliged by law merely to sketch them?

"DESFONTAINES, Royal Censor."

What could be done against a man who successively changed five censors into five advocates; who had on his side M. de Vaudreuil, M. de Fronsac, and the Prince de Nassau (then in Paris, and fighting boldly for his friend); all the youth of both sexes belonging to the court, actors and actresses, who, relying on a brilliant and fertile success, complained loudly of the injustice committed towards their theatre, and the whole of the public impatient, and loudly demanding to have their curiosity satisfied? What could the King, assisted by the keeper of the seals, and Suard, do against this explosion? They were obliged to grant to the world what had been granted to the courtiers of Gennevilliers. We are assured that in order to remove the King's scruples completely, some clever friends or awkward enemies of Beaumarchais' continually repeated to him that the piece would not meet with success; and as the King wished this might be the case with all his heart,

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he yielded to the feverish curiosity of the public, in hopes its expectations would be deceived.

In March 1784, Beaumarchais obtained the long asked for permission, and hastened to communicate the news to the actor Préville, who was then in the country, in the following letter, which is full of the joy and pride of triumph:—

"Paris, March 31, 1784.

"We have both made a mistake, my old friend. I was trembling lest you should leave the theatre at Easter, and you thought 'The Marriage of Figaro' would never be played. But one must never despair of keeping an actor who is adored by the public, nor of seeing a courageous author conquer when he believes he is in the right, and cannot be disheartened by the most disheartening things. My dear old friend, I have the consent of the King, that of the minister, and that of the lieutenant of police; I now only want yours to make a nice disturbance when we commence. Come, my dear friend; my piece is but a trifle, but to see it on the stage is the result of a contest of four years. This is what makes me think so much of it. What a deal of harm those malicious persons have done! Two years ago my friend Préville would have assured the success of my five acts; now the charm he will lend to an inferior character will cause the greatest regret that he does not play the first.*

"I am advised to have it studied and rehearsed quietly, and we have agreed to do so, without saying anything.

* In order to understand this, it must be known that Préville, who at first was to have played the part of Figaro, was now too old and worn out for such an important character, and had given it up to Dazincourt; but as he wished to contribute to the success of the piece, he consented to accept the part of Brid'oison.

Dazincourt and Laporte have undertaken to write to every one, desiring them to keep it secret, so that our good luck may not be spoiled once more. I greet, honour, and love you. "BEAUMARCHAIS."

The description of the first performance of "The Marriage of Figaro," is in every history of the period. It is one of the best known souvenirs of the eighteenth century. All Paris rushed, even in the morning, to the doors of the Théâtre-Français; ladies of the highest rank dined in the actresses' rooms in order to be sure of places; "*cordons bleus*," says Bachaumont, "mixed up in the crowd, and elbowing with Savoyards; the guard dispersed, the doors knocked in, the iron gates broken by the efforts of the assailants." "Three persons suffocated," says La Harpe; "one more," he adds maliciously, "than for Scudéry." On the stage, after the curtain was raised, was seen, perhaps, the most splendid assemblage of talent which was ever contained within the walls of the Théâtre-Français, all employed in promoting the success of a comedy which sparkled with wit, and carried the audience along by its dramatic movement and audacity, which, if it shocked or startled some of the private boxes, enchanted, excited, and inflamed an electrified pit.

Such is the picture which is to be found everywhere, and which, therefore, it is not necessary for us to dwell upon. We will only add one thing more,

which will, perhaps, complete it—namely, that Beaumarchais was in all this tumult, in a *loge grillée,** between two abbés, with whom he had been having a jovial dinner, and whose presence had seemed indispensable to him, in order that they might administer to him, he said, "*des secours très-spirituels,*" in case of death. We think this detail was wanting to complete the description of the first performance of "The Marriage of Figaro." †

* *i.e.*, a private box, with a screen of lattice-work in front.—TRANS.

† We conclude this to have been the case from an invitation to dinner, addressed by Beaumarchais to the Abbé de Calonne, brother of the minister for the day, for the first representation of "The Marriage of Figaro," and which terminates thus: "Come then, come; my Andalusian barber will not celebrate his marriage without your official presence. Like royal personages, he will put out placards to invite one hundred and twenty thousand persons to his wedding. Will it be a gay one? I cannot say. I conceived this child in joy, and please Heaven, I may be delivered of it without pain. . . . . But, hitherto I have not been fortunate with it. I shall require absolution and assistance of a very spiritual nature * at the critical moment; I expect them from you, and another ecclesiastic † in a very dark corner. *Venite, abbati, maledicemus de auctore;* but, above all, let us laugh if I am unfortunate. I only consent to be so on these terms. I greet, honour, and love you.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

Des secours très spirituels. † The Abbé Sabathier

CHAPTER XXVII.

GEOFFROY AND "THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO."—MORALITY OF BEAUMARCHAIS' COMEDY.—THE CHARACTER OF CHERUBINO, ALMAVIVA, FIGARO.—THE STAGE SERVANT, FROM THE SLAVE OF THE ANCIENT COMEDY DOWN TO FIGARO.

A CRITIC who was rather celebrated at the beginning of this century, and who has left a few good pages, unfortunately mixed with many others written in a coarse tone, and with a great dearth of ideas—Geoffroy—after having treated Beaumarchais to a broadside of insults, summed up his opinion of "The Marriage of Figaro" in the following manner, in the year 1802:—"Now that there are no more princes nor powerful nobles, nor a Maupeou Parliament; now, when we criticise 'Figaro' as if with the experience of ten centuries, it is nothing but a villanous rhapsody—a hash up of equivoques, grotesque conceits, puns, and quibbles. This debauch of wit, this wild style, still excite from time to time the laugh one gives to a farce; but after laughing at them, we despise them."

There was, however, one argument in Beaumarchais' favour in 1802, which rather embarrassed the

contemptuous critic. "The destiny of dramatic authors is an amusing thing," says Geoffroy elsewhere: "as far as art is concerned, Beaumarchais is certainly one of the least estimable; . . . . nevertheless, with the exception of 'The Two Friends,' all his pieces have remained, and, what is more fortunate, they are played; 'The Barber of Seville' and 'Figaro' are even popular. How many poets of much more merit have failed to have so brilliant a fate! La Chaussée has four pieces remaining in the répertoire, but not one is ever played; and La Chaussée, for style, taste, and everything which relates to art, is infinitely superior to Beaumarchais; but the literary good fortune of the author of 'The Marriage of Figaro' very much resembled his good fortune in civil and political matters; the one influenced the other greatly, and both proceeded from the same source. To instruct and amuse people is nothing; it is necessary to dazzle and deceive them."

How was it that Geoffroy, who was so humble in presence of political success, did not understand that literary success, when prolonged and sustained, is also of some value? and that if Beaumarchais' merit consisted in dazzling and deceiving people—which even then is not a talent which all possess—it was not with villanous rhapsodies alone that he could continue to dazzle and deceive them until the year 1802? What would he say if, in 1855, he saw people persist in

allowing themselves to be dazzled and deceived by these villanous rhapsodies, which, when well played, continue to attract the public, not only in France but everywhere? It is certain, that if the interest attached to a political satire was what first contributed to the immense success of "The Marriage of Figaro," it is not what supports it now. In order to be convinced of this, it is sufficient to see it performed, and notice how little effect this part of the piece generally produces on the audience. What biting sallies, what cutting allusions, aimed at institutions or abuses which no longer exist, at any rate not under the same form, after having formerly excited frantic applause, now pass unnoticed! The long monologue in the fifth act, which alarmed Louis XVI., and which met with such a lively echo from the parterre of *roturiers* of 1784, has hardly any effect on the democratic parterre of the present day. And this can be easily understood; during seventy years we have tried all kinds of aristocracy, and every class of society has at one time exclaimed, like "Figaro," "*Et moi morbleu!*" and at another has more or less turned the government and public treasury to their own profit. Did we not a short time since see an ingenious bourgeois usurp the title of workman, as Roman titles of nobility were formerly usurped, and, thanks to this stratagem, reach the threshold of the National Assembly, whence he

was excluded, because he could not produce his *quartiers de prolétariat?* A parterre which has seen all this, can hardly be moved by the satirical remarks of "Figaro" on those who have obtained everything in return, for having "taken the trouble to be born." What would be the position now of a Montmorency without a sou, by the side of the lowest plebeian, who might have contrived, speaking politely, *to gain* four or five millions at the Bourse?

However, this monologue in the fifth act is not really dead. Some passages still live, and during seventy years have from time to time had the good fortune to shine, like the effigies of Brutus and Cassius at the funeral of Junius. Geoffroy informs us that in the year 1802, some of the most insolent sarcasms of "Figaro" were suppressed, particularly the passage in the monologue of the fifth act, relating to the liberty of the press. Nevertheless, it seems that the actor Dugazon, who took the part of Figaro, was allowed to replace the passage by one of his own invention, which did not much please Geoffroy, for it was particularly directed against the celebrated critic of the "Journal des Débats." "I hear," said Figaro-Dugazon, "that in Madrid a prodigious number of journals have been established, and that one makes its fortune by libelling the greatest poets and the greatest talents." "The speech is short," said Geoffroy, "but vigorous, eloquent, and very suitable

to Figaro's character. This barber was personally interested in speaking publicly against an ill-natured journal, which was making its fortune in Madrid by laughing at street jesters and sorry buffoons." The present censorship, rather less severe than that of 1802, merely suppresses the same passage in the monologue, but no actor considers himself permitted to supply its place; and this hiatus still remains as an evidence of the vitality of a play which, after an existence of seventy years, after losing, by the ruin of the very things it attacked, that prestige of audacity which it derived from circumstances that no longer exist, yet still in certain places touches upon some delicate questions which have survived the Revolution. Certainly when Figaro says, "Printed follies are without importance, except in those places where their circulation is prevented," a lamentable experience, which is continually being renewed among us, immediately answers that this is not true, at least in France, and that, unfortunately for our country, printed follies engender real ones, which endanger order, and the cost of which has always to be paid in the end by liberty; but when Figaro adds, "Without the liberty to blame, no praise can be flattering," what man of good faith can deny that there is an eternal truth in this, and that the absolute prohibition to blame, takes greatly away from the moral value of the praise?

Thus the comedy of Beaumarchais, though its general importance in a political point of view is lost, still even in this respect preserves a certain reality, while to well-informed men it remains a curious monument of a peculiar state of affairs which will perhaps never re-appear in France—that of a government with abuses enough to supply materials in plenty for a satirical comedy, and at the same time too self-confident or too weak to prevent an audacious and obstinate author from putting it on the stage. The Aristophanic character of "The Marriage of Figaro," which incontestably contributes to its originality, although it no longer presents the dangers it formerly did, does not fail to raise many and often unexpected adversaries. Among these are many honest citizens, who would certainly be furious if by a stroke with a wand some magician one fine morning restored the ancient *régime* to them, with its colonels of seven years of age, its Maupeou Parliament, its *lettres de cachet*,* its thousand unjust privileges, and its thousand abuses.

* It is vain, from a superficial study of the past, to try to establish a comparison between the rigorous and illegal *régime*, from which individual liberty has sometimes suffered in the present century, with the system before the Revolution; no such comparison is possible. Let it be remembered only that, under Louis XV., a minister, the Duke de la Vrillière, carried his shamelessness so far as to allow his mistresses to sell blank orders for arrest, signed by the king. "The Marchioness de Langeac," says the Count de Tocqueville, in his

However, these men, because they like peace, and because the ancient *régime* could not be destroyed without a violent shock, are disposed to consider "The Marriage of Figaro" as a culpable incentive to disorder and anarchy. One must be consistent: those who admit that the destruction of the ancient order of things was just and necessary, cannot accuse Beaumarchais of having committed a crime in having contributed to it.

A more just objection, in my opinion, is that which bears upon the want of morality in "The Marriage of Figaro." It is certain that a comedy destined to chastise vice with laughter, cannot possess the austerity of a sermon, and it is not less certain that in Molière there are expressions as strong and situations as peculiar as any in "The Marriage of Figaro;" but if Molière with the frankness of genius did not recoil from describing all that seemed to him necessary in a truthful description of what he wished to paint, we do not find that, like Beau-

history of the reign of Louis XV., "traded in *lettres de cachet*, and never refused them to a powerful man who wished to be revenged on any one, or to satisfy a passion." It was not even always necessary to be a powerful man. M. de Ségur, in his "Souvenirs," relates the edifying story of a young flower-girl, who, to get rid of a jealous husband, had, by giving 10 louis to Madame de Langeac, obtained a *lettre de cachet* for his arrest. The same day, the husband having conceived the same idea as his wife, and having also given his 10 louis, each one had the other imprisoned.

marchais, he took a delight in discovering, unnecessarily multiplying, and dwelling upon those situations, ideas, and words, which have a licentious or coarse meaning. Almost all the characters in "The Marriage of Figaro," Almaviva, Cherubino, Basil, Figaro, Marceline, and even the Countess herself, although rather more reserved, seem influenced, or one might say, almost absorbed, by the same kind of pre-occupations. Is the character of Cherubino, for example, which found favour with critics who otherwise were severe on Beaumarchais, a true one? If Beaumarchais obtained the principal features of this character from *souvenirs* of his own childhood, which was marked by very great precocity, and even, it will be remembered, by very great effrontery, even for the eighteenth century, is it a very exact personification of the modesty natural to young persons, not only of thirteen years of age, but even of fifteen and sixteen? Is not that fiery ardour, which is occasioned by the wakening of the passions, kept back by some naïve and mysterious feeling, not cunning and affected, like that of Cherubino, who readily enough *dared* say to Susanna, like a young *roué*: "You know well enough, spiteful girl, that I *dare* not *dare*,"—but one which is truly timid, restless, and even rather *rude?* Are not those very ones, who turn out Don Juans, at first more or less like Hippolytus? This *nuances* which would give more grace, and also much

more truth to the character of Cherubino, seems to me almost absent, and yet it is so natural, that it is to be found even in works in which the heathen genius still predominates. Thus Daphnis, in the little story by Longus, if he has not the external propriety of Cherubino, certainly appears more timid and innocent. Little Jehan de Saintré, that Cherubino of the middle ages, possesses all the *nuances* which that of Beaumarchais requires; and even in the eighteenth century people understood the delicate feelings which are combined with the first ardour of youth, well enough to welcome with delight another Cherubino, who appeared, I believe, in the same year as that of Beaumarchais; and who is just his opposite. When people had been amused at seeing Count Almaviva's page trifling with Susanna, endangering the innocence of Fanchette, and sighing after the Countess, they read with delight, in the romance of Bernardin de St. Pierre, the beautiful words addressed by Paul to Virginia: "When I am weary, the sight of you revives me; when from the top of the mountain I see you in the valley, you seem like a rosebud in the midst of our orchards. Although I lose sight of you among the trees, I have no need to see you to find you again; something of you, I cannot tell what, remains to me in the air you pass through, and the grass you sit down upon. . . . . Tell me by what charm you have managed to en-

chant me: is it by your wit? But our mothers have more than both of us. Is it by your caresses? But they embrace me oftener than you do. I think it must be your goodness." . . . . . This is the moral spirit, which tempers and purifies the first tumult of the passions in a youth, who is at the same time much more natural and much more interesting than Cherubino.

Although modesty was not the distinguishing feature in Beaumarchais' disposition, he had still some suspicion that his piece surpassed the bounds generally granted to a comedy; therefore he was seen, like the engineers who are uneasy about the weak side of a place, continually occupied in defending the vulnerable side of "The Marriage of Figaro." The great object in his preface was to prove that "The Marriage of Figaro" was profoundly moral; his correspondence is full of letters to the actors in Paris, and to the directors of the provincial theatres, desiring them to perform the piece nobly, and not to spoil it by any impropriety, and to avoid turning gaiety into effrontery. All this is very well; as Beaumarchais himself would say, it is very good in argument, but "The Marriage of Figaro" could not be played to perfection by school-girls.

If it be true that the moral object of a comedy is to render vice ridiculous, contemptible, or odious, it would be difficult to discover the morality of this one.

The author has often been praised for the noble impartiality with which he has drawn the character of a noble libertine. Indeed, Count Almaviva, although defeated in his projects of seduction, still remains the man of distinction in the piece, not only by his rank and manners, but also by his feelings. And yet it is he in particular who represents vice, so that not much imagination is required when the disposition of Susanna is given to find out that if Almaviva lost his game one day, it only depended on himself if his fancy lasted, to take his revenge on Figaro soon afterwards. Figaro, as far as his intentions are concerned, is, taking him altogether, the honest man of the comedy: he defends his bride from corruption, and helps to bring the Count back to the Countess; but to find out his good qualities it is very necessary for the spectator to look twice, so complex is the nature of his physiognomy.

Figaro feels so proud of his superiority over all who surround him, that he takes a sort of pleasure in making himself out worse than he is. For instance, when he says of Basile, "Rogue, my junior, I'll teach you to limp before the lame," we might easily fancy that he wished to claim his seniority in roguery, whereas it is not roguery, but intrigue he so passionately loves. In the same way, in that coarse scene with Marceline, a scene which it is in vain for Beaumarchais to desire the actors to be careful to

act with propriety and dignity, when Figaro, on finding his mother, says, "Embrace me as maternally as you can; I was far from hating you: witness the money." This artificial and forced cynicism produces such a disagreeable impression, that when Beaumarchais puts a good sentiment in Figaro's heart, affecting words in his mouth, and real tears in his eyes, the public thinks it still a joke, and while Figaro is really weeping, the pit laughs loudly. We have often had the opportunity of remarking this stage effect which always takes place, and which, doubtless, was never intended by the author.

This universal *persiflage*, accompanied by considerable impropriety in the expressions, ideas, and situations, is evidently what constitutes the weak side of "The Marriage of Figaro." Nevertheless, whether it be that our century, with its great pretensions to austerity, is really no more virtuous than the preceding one, or whether it be that the sparkling and unceasing gaiety which pervades it throughout, does not leave the spectator time to think on what would otherwise shock him, it is very certain that the equivocal expressions and dangerous situations do not in the least injure the success of the piece. We have sometimes at the Sunday performances seen the honest faces of mothers of families expand and laugh with delight at the most daring sallies of Figaro, and at the scenes in the fifth act,

without seeming astonished at what is immodest in the former, or grossly unnatural in the latter. The public, taken as a whole, is perhaps more innocent than any of us who criticise, and who sometimes make mountains out of mole-hills. It is amused with whatever appears to it witty and amusing, and asks for no more.

Considered in an artistic point of view, and as regards the history of the stage in France, "The Marriage of Figaro," although its intrigue may be less judiciously constructed, and though it may be written with more inequality and affectation than the "Barber of Seville," is more fully carried out, and more original, while it represents more completely that instinct and taste for innovation which distinguished "The Barber of Seville."

It has been justly remarked, that what characterises comedy, as understood by Beaumarchais, is, to use a word which is more German than French, but which gives the idea in its most general sense, is its *modernité*, that is to say, the exclusion, or, at least as far as Figaro is concerned, the absolute transformation of all the traditions and types of the ancient style of comedy. Another thing that characterises it is the introduction of all the different classes of comedy, which Molière had treated separately in the "Misanthrope," the "Ecole des Femmes" and the "Fourberies de Scapin;" perhaps a somewhat inco-

herent combination, but at the same time one which was brilliant and original, with the tones and effects borrowed from the comedy of intrigue, the comedy of manners and character, and high comedy. "The Marriage of Figaro" offers food for all tastes; there is philosophical analysis even in those parts in which, as Sedaine says, in a letter to Beaumarchais, philosophy assumes the garb of Polichinelle; there are traits of character which are well conceived, and brilliantly expressed; stage effects which are very interesting and very cleverly introduced; with a dialogue, which is sometimes rather unpolished or pretentious, but often attractive even to those most difficult to please, from the vivacity with which the two interlocutors exchange the shuttlecock of repartee without once letting it fall to the ground. On the whole, we find a movement and vivacity borrowed from the Spanish comedy, which makes us overlook even improbabilities. Finally, there are certain portions exhibiting coarse humour and caricature, which are not the least successful. Beaumarchais did not understand the disdain of those delicate authors who are above employing certain means: all seemed good to him; he looked upon the assembled public as a great child, which was only anxious to laugh, and he was not far wrong. For the seventy years during which the "Marriage of Figaro" has been played, the tirade on "Goddam" has never failed to amuse

the pit; the stuttering of Brid'oison, the manner in which the officer of the court cries, "*Messieurs, Silence !*" in the trial scene, the picturesque and grotesque language of the drunkard Antonio, also contribute largely to the general effect.

Although the laugh which belongs to farce, as Geoffroy says, is no more to be despised in Beaumarchais than in Molière, in whom we also find it, it is evident that if "La Folle Journée" had no other merit, it would lose a great deal of its value; but this somewhat violent humour, combined with all the rest, helps to give the piece an inappreciable and an incomparable advantage, which all the elegance, and all the correctness possible, do not always bestow, and which is called life. Owing to this advantage, Beaumarchais' comedy need no more trouble itself about our moderate criticism of its defects, than about the lofty contempt of Geoffroy.

One question which is treated much less frequently than the preceding ones, and which nevertheless occurs here naturally enough, is that of the extent to which Beaumarchais, in his "Spanish" comedies, has availed himself of the Spanish drama. It appears to me incontestable that what he has borrowed amounts to very little. The characters are not very Spanish; Almaviva does not bear much resemblance to a Spanish grandee, particularly at the time of the *droit du seigneur*, that is to say, if

the *droit du seigneur* ever existed, above all in Spain, which I doubt; but even looking upon Almaviva as a French character, there is something singularly anomalous in this more or less authentic custom attributed to the first period of the middle ages, which is thus introduced in the midst of a comedy replete with the manners of the eighteenth century.

However, the ensemble of these different characters have a certain foreign air which it would be difficult to define, and which may proceed less from the personages themselves than from their names, costumes, guitars, balconies, and other accessories of the same sort, which give them a peculiar colouring. In its structure, "The Marriage of Figaro," with its surprises, night scenes, and stage effects, does present some analogy to the Spanish comedies, particularly to the interludes, which particularly interested Beaumarchais, as has been seen in his letters written from Spain. The principal personage, whose character is derived more from the French "Gil Blas" than from the Spanish *gracioso,* nevertheless, in some degree, resembles the latter type, if only in his taste for proverbs and witty expressions. In Moreto's comedy, called: "No puede ser el guardar una mujer," (it is impossible to restrain a woman,) a comedy which in its details presents some resemblance to "The Barber of Seville," there is a *gracioso,* Tarugo, who has some affinity

with Figaro. A witty and learned critic, M. Philarète Charles, in attempting the etymology of Figaro's name, which in itself is not Spanish, derives it from the word *picaro*, which is almost synonymous with rogue, and which has given a name to a whole series of novels in Spain called "Picaresques," the heroes of which are adventurers. In vain have I sought amongst Beaumarchais' papers for some verification of this etymology. What makes me suspect its correctness is, that in the manuscript of "The Barber of Seville," the author, instead of writing the name Figaro, always writes Figuaro. This name, which Beaumarchais has rendered so celebrated, must, then, have first entered his mind in a different form to that afterwards adopted by himself in the printed text, and which rather does away with the etymology of Picaro; but Figuaro being no more Spanish than Figaro, the difficulty remains the same, and the question is still as doubtful as in the case of Molière's "Tartuffe," the etymology of which is also somewhat uncertain. Perhaps it would be more correct to derive this fanciful name adopted by Beaumarchais, from the Spanish word *figura*, which is applied to characters in comedies, and which, changed to *figuron*, has become the common name for a whole class of pieces of the nature of caricature. Whatever may be the opinion about this etymology, what may seem strange at first is, that in all the

countries where Beaumarchais' two comedies were played,* Spain seems to be the one in which they were least successful. A rather distinguished Spanish dramatic author, Garcia de La Huerta, who is indeed very hostile to the French stage in general, speaking in 1785 of a Spanish translation of "The Barber of Seville," expresses himself in the following manner :—

"Don Manuel Fermin de Laviazo has translated "The Barber of Seville;" and although he has freed this comedy from its coarsest improprieties—although he has given it more

* They were translated in almost every language; for at the same time at which the Prince of Nassau mentions, in one of his letters, the existence and success of a Polish translation of "The Barber of Seville," Gudin, in his manuscript, assures us that "The Marriage of Figaro," "translated into Hindostanee, has been played in that language on those shores where the Greeks went to seek wisdom." Beaumarchais, with his thoroughly French character, seems, in general, to have cared very little for what was written about him in foreign parts. Any one would have thought, for instance, that he would have been very curious about the German drama, in which Goethe introduced him as a living character. He does not even mention it in his correspondence. It was only in 1784, when the first French translation of this drama, by Friedel, was printed, that the censor, before authorising its publication, wrote to Beaumarchais, to ask him if he consented to the translation appearing with his name. The latter, who was without doubt busy about something else, was some time without answering, which made the unfortunate translator miserable; at last he answered, by requesting the name of Beaumarchais, used by Goethe, might be changed to Ronac, and that of his brother-in-law Guilbert to Ilberto. It was, indeed, with these changes that the first translation of the German drama "Clavijo" appeared in France.

movement, by reducing it to three acts, and has ameliorated the style by changing the *soporific* (*soporifera*) prose of Beaumarchais into verse, the piece is nevertheless a burlesque comedy, full of that French platitude (*platitud Francesa*) which is intolerable to all persons of good taste."

This Spanish critic, it is seen, went boldly to work. He may be placed on a level with Geoffroy; he can even pride himself on having been the first to discover that the prose of "The Barber of Seville" was soporific. Certainly no one ever thought of reproaching it with that fault. This same La Huerta, after declaring that Beaumarchais' comedies could only be contemplated with the utmost contempt, accuses the French critics of not having sufficiently noticed the most essential faults, because they did not know the improbabilities which occurred throughout. And as he is kind enough to point out these enormous faults, I think people will perhaps not be sorry to know, in France, what shocks a rather pedantic Spaniard so greatly in Beaumarchais' comedies, and first of all in "The Barber of Seville."

"This piece," says La Huerta, "is not worth the trouble of a complete and rigorous examination. It will be sufficient, in order to convince the most obstinate, to exhibit a few of the numerous faults it contains—faults which are more inexcusable in M. de Beaumarchais than in any other person, not only because he resided some time in Spain, and even long enough to avoid the errors he has committed, but also because he boasts loudly of his knowledge of our manners. For instance, what man would not laugh, however little he might

know of the manners of Spain, to see a barber, who, having a shop open at Seville, goes into the street at seven or eight o'clock in the morning, at the *very time* he would have *to shave his customers*, with the air and costume of a *majo*, with a guitar slung on his shoulder, writing a seguedilla, from time to time touching up his song with a pencil, and using his knee as a desk. Such a being never existed and never will exist, and if it were possible for a barber to commit such a folly, he would soon be punished for it, for he would find himself hunted out of the place with shouts by the children, and perhaps with stones. It is in vain to say, in order to do away with the absurdity of the situation, that the barber's house is only at a few steps' distance; for in that case he could show the house to Count Almaviva, without its being necessary to give him such a detailed description of it. But the greatest improbability consists in the inopportuneness of the hour chosen by the author—an hour at which even those blind persons who gain their livelihood by playing the hurdy-gurdy, are not in the habit of making their din. And this is why the barber, even at his own door, could neither sing nor play the guitar, as the people of the neighbourhood, who would be disturbed by him, would oblige him to leave off and go away.

"It is not less absurd to bring on the stage Count Almaviva, a title which does not exist in Spain, and above all with the rank of *grandee*, which this prosaic * poet gives him, to have him dressed in the Spanish style as well as Rosina, and at the same time to give us the ridiculous barber dressed as a

* This objection of La Huerta's, which consists in reproaching Beaumarchais with having introduced into a comedy a Spanish grandee under an imaginary name, instead of giving him a real one, will seem rather extraordinary in France. The impropriety would to us consist far more in bringing a real name on to the stage.

majo—a very extraordinary synchronism for a Spaniard, and for all who know that the costume; and even the name of *majo*, are so modern in Spain; that the name would not be found in any book more than fifty years old. . This is why the Spanish Academy, when accepting the word *majo* in the fourth volume of its dictionary, printed in 1737, received it without giving any authority for its origin, apparently because it could not discover any on account of the word being so modern; and it was probably for the same reason that it omitted the words *maja*, *majeza*, and other derivatives which are now in use, but which were not so general in 1737. Those must therefore be very ignorant, who say and think that a *majo's* dress is the peculiar and characteristic costume of our nation, while it certainly is, on the contrary, the most opposed to our grave and circumspect character. . . . . And in any case, the costume was not in use when the Spanish dress was worn; it is therefore wrong to combine them, and make them appear at the same time in a piece.

"The names given by Beaumarchais to some of the actors in his comedies are equally ridiculous and improper. The name of Bartholo, which he gives to a physician, is only used in Spain among people of the lowest class, and in the most familiar style, because it is a kind of diminutive of Bartholome, and is only used to express contempt or affection; this shows that there is a very culpable (*muy culpable*) ignorance in supposing that the billeting paper spoken of in the second act of "The Barber," could be addressed simply to Doctor *Bartholo*. Gracefully corresponding with this ignorance is that which consists in calling the two Galician valets, one L'Eveillé, (that is to say, el Despierto), and the other La Jeunesse, that is to say (La Juventud), names which belong to the French soldiery, or to the servants in some of the hotels in Paris, and not to Galician valets, who are more often called Domingo or Farruco. Certainly a

L'Eveillé and a La Jeunesse, form, with a Doctor Bartholo, a very merry company.

"Notwithstanding all these faults, and many others equally gross, which I will not stop to mention, because to treat of all would require a thick volume, this comedy, which was much applauded in Paris and in all France, is one of the most successful of modern comedies, and one of the most frequently played. We must conclude from this that the public is everywhere vulgar, that it approves of absurd things, and becomes enthusiastic about those works which have the least merit."

What a terrible man this Spanish pedant was! What a fanatical love of probability! No one would suspect that this criticism proceeded from the country which has produced those heroes of tragedy and comedy, who are

"Enfants au premier acte et barbons au dernier."

It is probable that if Beaumarchais had read this crushing criticism of La Huerta's, he would have contented himself with copying out and sending to him the following passage in the preface to "The Barber of Seville:"—"Connoisseurs have remarked that I have fallen into the error of causing French customs to be criticised by a humourist of Seville, at Seville, while probability demanded that he should enlarge upon the manners of Spain. They are right; I had thought of the point so much, that to make the *vraisemblance* still more perfect, I had first of all resolved to write the piece, and cause it to be acted in Spanish; but a man of taste

observed to me, that that perhaps might make it less amusing to the public of Paris; for which reason I determined to write it in French."

After thus crushing "The Barber of Seville" in the preface to one of the volumes of his "Spanish Theatre," La Huerta announced for a succeeding volume a critique on "The Marriage of Figaro;" but just as he was about to begin his task, he gave it up, because, as he says, the piece was too contemptible in every way.

"This comedy is," says he, "a continuation of 'The Barber of Seville;' it is conceived in the same spirit, and we find the same characters, with the exception of the two Galicians, so aptly christened La Jeunesse and L'Eveillé,* but the faults in 'Figaro' are *much more enormous* (*mucho mas enormes*) than those in 'The Barber of Seville.' Calumnies and sarcasms against our nation, want of propriety and truth, and a total absence of all probability, are the principal qualities which adorn the piece. For this reason, and because I have read a letter written to a Spanish lady, residing in Paris, by an inhabitant of Madrid, in which 'The Marriage of Figaro' is analysed and ridiculed with sufficient grace, and as this letter is circulated in manuscript among all people of taste, I consider that I am dispensed from the painful task of reading such a contemptible farce again; and yet this comedy, *with all its faults, has partisans even among us*. Nothing is more common than to see people undertake to judge what they do not understand.

* We see that Huerta could not digest the two false Galicians. However, in "The Marriage of Figaro," the name of Grippe-Soleil, a young Andalusian shepherd, occurs, which must be still more difficult to translate into Spanish than La Jeunesse or L'Eveillé.

Many think that poetry is such a common thing, that every one can appreciate its productions, just as they would cabbages or any other vegetables sold in the market."*

This appreciation of La Huerta's cannot be taken as the exact expression of the opinion of his compatriots on Beaumarchais' comedies, particularly as La Huerta himself says that these works have their partisans in Spain. However, we have had an opportunity of ascertaining that they had not so much success on the other side of the Pyrenees, as in several other countries. Some well-informed Spaniards, whom we consulted, did not even know "The Marriage of Figaro."† This is easily understood, when one considers that it is precisely this very slight and more or less correct Spanish colouring thrown over a groundwork of French ideas and manners, which, while giving to Beaumarchais' comedies a much more attractive character, as far as the French are concerned, makes this combination much less interesting to Spaniards, who are shocked by its heterogenous nature.

However, notwithstanding the anachronisms a Spaniard may easily find in the costume of Figaro, and notwithstanding the more grave faults which

* Theatro espanol por don Vincente Garcia de la Huerta, prefaces to the 5th and 13th volumes.

† However, we are assured, on the other hand, that at Seville there are Spanish *ciceroni* who show to ingenuous travellers the spot where Figaro's shop stood. I think they even go so far as to show the shop itself.

French critics have found in this character, Beaumarchais has made it one of those which will remain in the history of art, and in the memory of man. Figaro will live as long as Panurge, as long as Gil Blas. I think an instructive and novel study might be made of this character; it would have to be compared to all the characters of a like nature; we should have to show that Figaro is at the same time the king and the last of stage valets. Beaumarchais came at the very moment when the traditional type represented by the slave in ancient comedy, and which continued for ages, with some modifications, had lost all signification. By giving this character its best form, Beaumarchais in some degree completed the existence of the type;—since Figaro there has been, and there can be, no *valet de comédie*.

Contrary to the opinion of Diderot, and to that expressed by the learned M. Naudet, in the preface to his translation of Plautus, I think it might be proved that the character of the servant in comedy, although born of the ancient slave, is not a purely artificial importation which has remained without having anything to do with our customs, and without ever having possessed reality. From the ancient slave to the comedy servant, as Beaumarchais understood it, a whole series of transformations might be noted, in which this type would be seen to adapt itself, more or less, to all the forms of society in which it is in-

troduced. The slave in ancient comedy, particularly in the works of Plautus, where the character is strongly marked, should be taken and then compared with the slave of that comedy of the fourth century, which was discovered by M. Magnin, entitled "Querolus," in which is to be found one of the most curious figures, as an expression of the imminent fall of slavery. This same character should then be studied as it reappeared in the fifteenth century, transformed into a valet in the first dramatic attempt, moulded more or less upon the ancient comedy, and called Célestine. The valet should then be examined, as the character is found in the comedies of the sixteenth century, in Larivey's pieces, for instance, in which it is also copied from the antique, but considerably modified. This type might be followed in Molière's comedies of intrigue; it will be found to change more and more in the comedies of Regnard, where the valet becomes exacting and insolent enough to call his master a thief when he does not pay him his wages, and particularly so in those of Lesage. Here Crispin, "the rival of his master," is really on the point of supplanting the latter with his affianced bride, and when his fraud is discovered, instead of receiving a beating, according to custom from time immemorial, he and his companion La Branche are addressed as follows by the father-in-law: "You have talent, but you should

turn it to a better purpose, and in order to make honest men of you I will put you into business." Beaumarchais' fantastic servant exactly represents the servant who is going to turn master, and enter into business. By thus following this character of the slave of the ancient drama, century by century, as he becomes transformed into the comedy servant, it might, I think, be shown not only that this character, which represents on the stage the constant protestation of intelligence against force and privilege, has always had some connexion with the social condition of those amongst whom it has appeared, but also that these successive alterations have corresponded pretty closely with the change which took place in society from slavery to serfdom, from serfdom to hereditary, and to a certain degree forced service, and from this to service freely chosen and freely left, in which in fact the servant is only what is in revolutionary style called "an official." The consequence of these different changes is, that this traditional type of cunning and knavery has no longer any meaning; being no longer the expression of revolt in a mind oppressed by servitude, as in former times, nor that of one restricted in its development, as in an aristocratic state of society, the slave or servant can no longer play the part on the stage they formerly did.

Accordingly, the comedy servant has almost disappeared from the stage, at least in his old form; in-

stead of representing the ingenious man in a comedy of intrigue, he now takes the same part as in real life, that is to say, he announces visitors, and brings in letters.

We can here only indicate this notion respecting the comedy servant; we leave to others the task of verifying it as we ourselves have done.* One thing

* We tried at the College de France to sketch in a lecture a sort of monography of this type of the slave and the servant of comedy. We shall not give the whole of it here, for fear of overloading with dissertations a work which is more especially biographical and historical. We will only say, for those whom the question may interest, that a simple comparison of a few types of the *slave*, and a few types of the *servant*, is sufficient to show that the Frontins, Crispins, and Scapins are copies of the Davi, Getæ, and Libani; they are very modified copies, not so much as to the exterior physiognomy, as in the very basis of the sentiments and ideas, in the moral physiognomy, if it be permitted to use that expression. Now, it is precisely these modifications brought to bear on the traditional type which form the connexion between the character of the comedy servant, with the manners of each epoch, and impress upon these figures an incontestable stamp of truth, till the time when the French Revolution put an end to them.

For example, take the character of the slave Libanus in the "Asinarius" of Plautus, and compare him with the hero of Molière's piece, "Les Fourberies de Scapin." Both parts have the same characteristics of cunning and impudence, the same style of tricks and lies for robbing the father of money, and assisting the son in his intrigues; but beneath this external resemblance we discover the essential difference between the ages. Libanus is a being in whom slavery has destroyed all good instincts, and developed every bad one to an unbounded extent. His cunning bears the stamp of degradation, and his gaiety is often ferocious. He is the slave continuing on the stage, the

certain is, that Beaumarchais was lucky enough to be able to connect a theatrical character with one of the

momentary licence of the saturnalia, who takes a pleasure in enumerating, with a kind of savage energy, the cruel punishments he is so accustomed to bear while braving them; *houssines*, sticks, crosses, red-hot blades, dungeons and tortures. "How many times," he says to his friend Leonidas, "hast thou by the hardness of thy skin defied the exertions of eight great fellows armed with supple rushes!" It was merely for the pleasure of doing mischief that Libanus employed his talent for intrigue in administering to the passions of his young master. Between the latter and himself no shadow of affection exists, and one would rather say that he was anxious to give him back contempt for contempt. Thus, before giving Argyrippus the money he has cheated his father out of, he obliges Argyrippus to transform himself into a beast of burden, to go on all fours, and to carry him, Libanus, on his back. Notwithstanding his protestations, Argyrippus is forced to submit to this exaction, and the slave rides round the theatre mounted on the back of his young master, crying out, "This is the way to subdue proud hearts." This scene must have had great success with the pit of the period, the *cavea* where the freed men and the slaves crowded at the same time. This characteristic of brutal and sinister gaiety, this basis of hatred and contempt, are found no more in the physiognomy of Scapin. This latter is a cunning, witty, and joyful adventurer, who, as he says, has had *a little misunderstanding with the law*, but who is not at all anxious to renew it. If he has embraced the profession of a valet, it is only because he sees no other career in which he could exercise his talents with so much advantage to himself. He does not scruple to play tricks even on his young master, and yet he identifies to a certain point his master's existence with his own, and possesses a certain amount of affection for him. Thus, when Léandre, after having ill-treated and tried to kill him, is in want of his help, and begs his pardon, Scapin resists, till Leander throws himself on his knees. Then Scapin's heart is softened: "Get up," says he, to Leander, "and another time do not be so hasty."

most important crises in human history. The memory of Figaro is intimately connected with that

The difference between his feelings and actions, compared with those of the slave Libanus, is in direct proportion to the difference in their respective conditions.

To maintain that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were no valets in real life who resembled more or less these Scapins, Crispins, and Frontins would be to contradict all contemporary evidence. Domestic service was then the only career open to many tolerably cultivated and very refined intellects. They brought to it a talent for intrigue which is now to be found in many other employments on a much larger and more profitable scale; a man who would have been a Scapin in the seventeenth century, is in our days a grand personage decorated with many orders, who has been able to fish out of troubled waters a fortune large enough to enable him to keep several valets, infinitely more ingenuous than their master. In "Les Precieuses Ridicules," La Grange says, "that he has a valet named Mascarille who passes for a sort of a *bel esprit*, sets up for a man of condition, piques himself on his gallantry, and his verses," &c., &c. There is nothing improbable in this, when we remember that during the celebrated *journée des Madrigaux*, when a sudden rage for versification seized upon the whole of Mlle. Scudéry's party, even the valets were affected by it, according to the chronicle; and finally when Mercier, in his "Tableau de Paris," in the eighteenth century describes the real valet, the lackey, the portrait so closely resembles that of the comedy servant, that it is easy to mistake it. "Generally," says he, "a fashionable lackey takes his master's name, when among other lackeys; he also imitates his habits, gestures, and manners. He wears a gold watch, lace ruffles, and is impertinent and conceited. Among young people he is the master's confidant when the latter has no money; he is his slave when he has a fancy to gratify, and the most intrepid of liars when it is necessary to send away creditors, or get his master out of trouble." There is not much difference between this character and that of Scapin. In a word, it is with this valet as with many other person-

of the French Revolution, and nothing more is necessary to render a name eternal.

ages in the comedy of intrigue of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Joined to the imitation of the ancients, we can discern the imitation of actual truth: sometimes, indeed, the two imitations are confounded. Though there was much difference between the society of the ancients and that of the eighteenth century, there was still one point of resemblance between them: they were both aristocratically organised, and this explains how the types of ancient comedy, particularly that of the slave, have been able to live on, with some modifications, through the comedy of intrigue, as it was understood in France before the Revolution.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO."—DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARTS.—SUARD AND THE PRINCE OF SWEDEN.—THE BENEVOLENT MATERNAL INSTITUTION.—THE TIGER AND THE FLEA.—BEAUMARCHAIS IN ST. LAZARE.—"THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO" BEFORE THE COURT.

"THE Marriage of Figaro" had been represented sixty-eight times successively, with unparallelled success. The first time it was played the receipts amounted to 6511 livres; the sixty-eighth time they were 5483 livres. In eight months from April 27, 1784, to January 10, 1785, the piece had brought the Comédie-Française (without counting the fiftieth representation, which was, at Beaumarchais' suggestion, given for the benefit of the poor), the gross sum of 346,197 livres, from which, after all expenses had been deducted, a clear profit of 293,755 livres was left for the actors, minus Beaumarchais' share as author, which was valued at 41,499 livres. We see from this, that if "The Marriage of Figaro" was open to criticism as a work of art, it was of undeni-

able value as a means of obtaining money. It is true that the piece was got up with the greatest care, and acted to perfection.

All the principal parts were intrusted to actors of the first merit. Mademoiselle Sainval, who was the tragic actress then in vogue, at the urgent request of Beaumarchais, had accepted the part of Countess Almaviva, in which she displayed a talent which was the more striking from being unexpected. Mademoiselle Contat enchanted the public in the character of Susanna, by her grace, the refinement of her acting, and the charms of her appearance and voice. A very young and very pretty actress, who was soon afterwards carried off by death, in her eighteenth year—Mademoiselle Olivier, whose talent, says a contemporary, was as *naïve* and fresh as her face—lent her *naïveté* and her freshness to the somewhat warm part of Cherubino. Molé acted the part of Count Almaviva with the elegance and dignity which distinguished him. Dazincourt represented Figaro with all his wit, and relieved the character from any appearance of vulgarity. Old Préville, who was not less successful in the character of Brid'oison, had given it up after a few days to Dugazon, who interpreted it with more power and equal intelligence. Desessarts, with his rich humour, gave relief to the character of Bartholo, which is thrown somewhat into the back-ground. The secondary parts of Basil and

Antonio were equally well played by Vanhove and Bellemont; finally, through a singular caprice, a somewhat celebrated tragedian, Larive, not wishing tragedy to be represented in the piece by Mademoiselle Sainval alone, asked for the insignificant little part of Grippe-soleil. The immense success of this Aristophanic comedy, while it filled some persons with anxiety and alarm, naturally roused the envious crowd who are never wanting, particularly when a successful person takes a pleasure in spreading his fame abroad,—and Beaumarchais' foible is well known. It was in the midst of a fire of satires in prose and verse, that the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" pursued his career, pouring out on his "blasphemers" not torrents of light, but torrents of liveliness and fun, also both in prose and in verse.*

Not contented with writing songs about him, his enemies laid snares for him. When he wrote a cutting letter to one of his friends, President Dupaty, who

* Some of the satirical pieces against "The Marriage of Figaro" have been often quoted, but Beaumarchais' answers are less known. The following, for instance, is an unpublished quatrain of his in answer to an epigram by the poet Piis. Beaumarchais' quatrain seems to me not without point:—

Ton Pégase, Piis, est tombé dans l'ornière.
De son temple le Goût te ferme l'*ostium*.
Au bon petit Jésus je fais cette prière:
Auge Piis ingenium.

had asked him for a *loge grillée*, for some very "scrupulous" ladies, who wished to see his piece, but did not wish to be seen, the letter was circulated; it was said that he had had the audacity to address it to a duke and peer of France, and he was obliged to write to the minister of the King's household to correct the statement.* Before the whole Academy the "austere" Suard,† on receiving M. Montesquiou as director, in presence of the Royal Prince of Sweden, afterwards Gustavus III., who was travelling under the name of the Count de Haga, had contrived to introduce into his discourse a very violent tirade against "The Marriage of Figaro." It was applauded even by those who the night before had most loudly applauded Beaumarchais' piece. After the meeting, the Prince Royal of Sweden, in complimenting M. Suard, said to him: "You treated us rather severely, perhaps with rea-

* *Vide*, in Appendix, No. 21, Dupaty's letter and Beaumarchais' reply.

† We are not going to attack Suard; but as he attacked Beaumarchais with violence, and as we shall soon see that it was he who occasioned his imprisonment at Saint-Lazare, no one will be astonished if we consider it necessary to state here, that there are details about Suard, contained in Diderot's letters to Mademoiselle Voland, which, if they are true, are not very creditable to his "austerity," for they would tend to prove that he was one of those persons who are the more severe in theory in proportion as they are less so in practice. See Appendix, No. 22, an extract from Diderot's letters in reference to Suard.

son; but," added he laughing, "I am so inaccessible to reason, that I now leave you, to go and hear 'Figaro' for the third time." "Fine fruits my sermon has produced, your highness," said Suard.*

The author of "The Marriage of Figaro," on the other hand, as if to consecrate his piece, devoted all it produced to works of charity.

"I propose," said he, in a letter to the 'Journal de Paris,' August 12, 1784, "I propose to form a benevolent institution, to which every woman known to be poor may, on being recommended by the curate of her parish, come with her child in her arms, and say:—'I am a mother, and have a child to nurse; I used to gain twenty sous a day, my child costs me twelve.' Twenty sous a day make thirty francs a month: we might give this woman nine francs in charity, which, with the nine francs that the husband would no longer have to pay to a stranger, would leave them eighteen francs in pocket. The mother will not have much good will if she cannot gain eight sous per day, while suckling her child, and thus she gets the thirty livres again.

"At the risk of being again looked upon as a vain man, I will devote all my 'Figaro' to this purpose; it is money which belongs to me, which I have gained by my labour in spite of torrents of printed and written abuse. Now when the actors have received 200,000 francs, my nurses will have 28,000; with the 30,000 from my friends, I shall have a whole regiment of children fattening upon the maternal milk. All this compensates for a great many insults."

The Comédie-Française, not willing to be surpassed

* In Garat's "Memoirs of Suard," the speech of the Prince of Sweden is given differently. I take the version published by Madame Suard, as being the most probable.

in zeal by Beaumarchais, consented to devote the entire receipts of the fiftieth representation to the benefit of the institution for poor nursing mothers; and the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" replaced all the final couplets, by others which were adapted to the circumstances, and which do not appear in his works.

SUZANNE.

Pour les jeux de notre scène
Ce beau jour n'est point fêté.
Le motif qui nous ramène
C'est la douce humanité.
Mais quand notre cinquantaine
Au bienfait sert de moyen,
Le plaisir ne gâte rien.

FIGARO.

Nous, heureux cinquantenaires
D'un hymen si fortuné,
Rapprochons du sein des mères
L'enfant presque abandonné.
Faut-il un exemple aux pères?
Tout autant qu'il m'en naîtra
Ma Suzon les nourrira.

Then turning towards Brid'oison, Figaro said, "Your turn, Monsieur le Judge!"

BRID'OISON.—How can a person sing when he is affected? Besides, nothing has been written for me.

FIGARO.—You have so much facility.

BRID'OISON.—Yes, indeed; for people to come and say to me afterwards "more stupid than the author himself."

FIGARO.—Why not?

BRID'OISON.—Well, after all, I don't care; and I'll tell you at once what I think about all this.—(*Sings; scratching his head all the while, as if inventing the words.*)

Que d'plaisir on trouve à rire
Quand on n'voit du mal à rien!
Que d' bonheur on trouve à s' dire:
L'on m'amuse, et j' fais du bien!
Que d' bel' chos' on peut écrire
Contre tant d' joyeux ébats!
Nos cri...itics n'y manq'ront pas (*Bis*).

In effect, the critics did *not* fail to do so; for the very next day the following quatrain was circulated:—

De Beaumarchais admirez la souplesse.
En bien, en mal son triomphe est complet:
A l'enfance il donne du lait
Et du poison à la jeunesse.*

The institution for the benefit of poor nursing mothers met with obstacles, which were probably occasioned by the enmity felt towards the man who wished to found it, and it was impossible to establish it in Paris; but as the idea was a good one, it was not abandoned. The Archbishop of Lyons, M. de Montazet, adopted it. He freely accepted the assistance and money of Beaumarchais; and the Benevolent Maternal Institution, which still exists, I believe, in

* Admire the versatility of Beaumarchais.
In good as in evil his triumph is complete:
To infancy he gives milk,
And to youth poison.

Lyons, had its origin in "The Marriage of Figaro." Beaumarchais was one of its most constant supporters. In 1790 he sent to this establishment a further sum of 6000 francs, and received in return the following letter, signed by three of the most influential and respectable inhabitants of Lyons:—

"Lyons, April 11, 1790.

Sir,—In informing you of the success of the Benevolent Maternal Institution, we speak of what has been your own work. From you did we derive the idea, therefore it is to you that the plan of the establishment belongs. You have assisted it with your generous donations, and more than two hundred children, who have been preserved to their country, owe their existence to you. We consider ourselves happy to have contributed towards it, and our gratitude will always equal the respectful sentiments with which

We are, Sir, &c.

"The Administrators of the Benevolent Maternal Institution,

"PALERNE DE SACY, CHAPP, and TABAREAU."

While Beaumarchais was thus occupying public attention by the most various means,* his enemies,

* He was accused especially of inventing out-of-the-way stories and circulating them in connexion with his piece. The following anecdote was related as an invention of this kind.—A young man, reduced to the last extremity of misery, wrote to Beaumarchais, begging the favour of being allowed to see "The Marriage of Figaro" before he committed suicide. Strange as it may appear, the fact was nevertheless true. The author of this letter was a young writer named Feydel, who in after years attained some celebrity. His letter, which is to be found among Beaumarchais' papers, seemed

headed by Suard, worried him incessantly with anonymous articles in the "Journal de Paris." One day, having been maliciously asked in this journal what had become of Figaro's little girl, who is mentioned in "The Barber of Seville," but of whom nothing more is heard in "The Marriage of Figaro," he replied by a story very amusingly told, in which little Miss Figaro turns out to be a child formerly adopted by the Spanish barber, afterwards settled in France and married to a poor workman at the Port St. Nicholas, named Lécluse, who had just been crushed by an accident, leaving her with two children on her hands; he ended by invoking the charity of his interrogator for Lécluse's widow.

The fact as to Lécluse's widow was true, but this style of answering Suard's anonymous sarcasms, by calling upon him to perform a charitable action, apparently displeased him; for, whether actuated by his own inclination, or whether, as it has been said, he was induced to continue his attacks by the Count de Provence, afterwards Louis XVIII., who was amused by them, and who is said to have had his share in their composition, he continued to attack Beaumarchais anonymously in articles which

to us witty enough to deserve insertion in the Appendix, No. 23 *bis*. We must add, that Beaumarchais hastened to visit the unhappy young man in his garret where he lived, that he procured him a situation, and gave him all the aid in his power.

became more and more insulting every day. At first the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" replied with his usual gaiety; at last, however, tired of the business, he wrote, March 6, 1785, a final letter, in which he assured the editors of the "Journal de Paris" that he should not answer the anonymous insults again; and by way of explaining, in the most energetic manner, all the importance he attached to them, he employed this highly-coloured, though somewhat carelessly expressed antithesis:— "When I have had to conquer lions and tigers," said he, "in order to get a comedy acted, do you think that after its success, you will reduce me to the level of a Dutch housemaid, to hunt every morning the *vile insect of the night?*"

As Suard was personally very small, he might have taken the last term of this not very delicate antithesis for himself. Unfortunately for Beaumarchais, who thought he had only Suard to deal with, the Count de Provence, although very stout, having, it appears, taken part in Suard's attacks, was much offended by this redoubtable antithesis, and complained to the King, his brother, of Beaumarchais' insolence. However, as he took care to conceal the part which had most offended him, and as he was very ingenious, he easily persuaded his brother that Beaumarchais' crime did not consist in speaking of the "vile insect of night," but

of having written the words "lions and tigers," which, according to him, *evidently* meant the King and Queen.

To accuse any one of having dreamt of comparing Louis XVI. to a tiger, or even to a lion, was almost like accusing him of having attempted to carry off the towers of Notre Dame in his pocket. Beaumarchais had only introduced the tigers for the literary advantage of his antithesis, and in order to bring out the "vile insect of the night;" but Louis XVI.—the best of men, although subject to fits of hastiness, which were, however, generally limited to an abrupt manner of speaking—Louis XVI. was already irritated against Beaumarchais. The immense success of a comedy, which had been played in some sort against his will, a success which made him uneasy as a King, and which shocked him as a Christian, rendered him disposed to listen to the most improbable accusations. The present one made him quite beside himself. Without leaving the card-table at which he was seated, he wrote—if the author of 'Souvenirs d'un Sexagénaire,' M. Arnault, is to be believed—on a seven of spades, in pencil, an order to arrest Beaumarchais immediately, and, adding insult to injury, which is never excusable in a sovereign, gave orders not to conduct him to an ordinary prison, but to one which covered at the same time with ridicule and shame a man who was fifty-three years of age, that is

to say, St. Lazare, where juvenile offenders were confined.

To treat like a young vagabond a man of Beaumarchais' age and celebrity, a man to whom important missions had been confided, who had been initiated into state society, who had been charged with most important operations, who was known to be at the head of a large house of business, and whose talents exercised a powerful influence on the public, was more than an injustice, it was one of the gravest faults: for it was making manifest to all eyes the pernicious influence which could be exercised at times by power uncontrolled by laws, even on the most good-natured of princes. This arbitrary act is, however, the only one with which Louis XVI. personally can be reproached.

Such is the frivolity of the Parisian public, that when it was known, on the morning of March 9, 1785, that the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," in the midst of his triumph had been imprisoned the previous evening, without any one knowing why, in company with the young thieves of St. Lazare, the fact seemed at first very amusing, and the laughter occasioned by it was almost universal. The next day people began to inquire the reason of this strange incarceration, and as the government could give none, and knew of none (for it was very awkward to confess that Beaumarchais was imprisoned because they were

inclined to believe that he had intended to compare Louis XVI. to a tiger), the public became unruly, and began to murmur. The following day, the murmurs became loud. "Every one," says Arnault, "felt in danger, not only as regarded his liberty, but also as regarded his personal dignity." On the fourth day there was a general movement of indignation, particularly among the young men, and the excitement was so great, that Arnault, although then in the service of the Count de Provence, informs us that he could not resist writing one of the most audacious odes against this act of tyranny.* At last, on the fifth day, Beaumarchais was forced, almost against his will, to leave the prison; for in his resentment for the shameful iniquity of which he was a victim, he wished to remain in prison until his crime was specified, and his judges appointed. The unpublished Memorial which he addressed from St. Lazare to the king is curious, as exhibiting a situation equally embarrassing for Louis XVI. and for Beaumarchais. The lieutenant of police had, without doubt, given the prisoner some idea of the true cause of the King's

* A sheet of "Nouvelles à la main," which lies before me, after giving a detailed account of the arrest and imprisonment of Beaumarchais, winds up with a sentence which seems to be the expression of the public feeling: "People are inquiring," says the anonymous writer, "whether any one can be sure of sleeping to-night in his own bed."

anger; but how was the subject to be broached? How was he to excuse himself in the eyes of the King for having likened him to a tiger? "In comparing" says Beaumarchais, "the great obstacles I had to overcome in order to get a poor comedy played, with the repeated attacks which one looks down upon after a success, I took the two extremes in the scale of comparison, and in the same manner that I might have said, 'After having fought with giants, am I to march against pigmies;' or have employed any other illustration, I said . . . . . But if any one should persist in thinking there can exist any being in France so utterly mad as to wish to offend the king, in a letter examined by the censor and published in a newspaper, have I as yet given any signs of such a madness, that people should hazard such an accusation against me without proof?"

A few days of reflection, doubtless, made the King understand that he could not decently admit the intention attributed to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" to him, and yielding to those feelings of justice and kindness which were so natural to him, after having in a manner begged Beaumarchais to leave the prison, he took a pleasure in doing all he could to compensate him in every way for his shameful detention, which had lasted five days. Grimm states that nearly all the ministers were at the representation of "Figaro," which took place on

Beaumarchais leaving prison, and which met with a most brilliant reception. They had the slight annoyance of hearing the following phrase in the famous monologue, applauded most energetically: "Not being able to degrade intellect, they avenge themselves by persecuting it." M. de Calonne wrote to Beaumarchais to say that the king considered he had justified himself, and would be happy to take every opportunity of testifying his good-will towards him. Louis XVI. did so soon afterwards, in a most noble manner, and one most worthy of a sovereign who felt that he had been in the wrong. "The Barber of Seville," says Grimm, "was acted in the little theatre of Trianon, before the Queen's private party; and the author was honoured by an invitation to be present at the representation. The Queen herself took the part of Rosina; the Count of Artois that of Figaro; M. de Vaudreuil that of Count Almaviva, &c." Certainly no more delicate flattering reparation could have been made to Beaumarchais for the insult he had received.

To these delicate reparations were added more substantial proofs of the King's good-will; but a mistake has been made on this subject, arising from a letter published for the first time in the small 18mo. edition of Beaumarchais' life, which M. Ravenel has enriched with his interesting notes. In this letter, which is without an address, and dated

June 1785, Beaumarchais leads us to infer that he had received from the King, since his disgrace, two million one hundred and fifty thousand livres on account of some advances of long standing, for which he had been soliciting payment. There is a material error here, either because the letter which was reprinted by M. Ravenel from a journal was not authentic, or because it was to Beaumarchais' interest to appear to have received this large sum of upwards of two millions in full at that time. One thing is certain, that he only received 800,000 francs at this time. It will be remembered that since 1779 he had been trying to obtain from the government an indemnity for his fleet of merchant vessels, which had been sacrificed to the military operations of Admiral d'Estaing. It will be remembered that he had received in succession 905,000 francs at one period, and at another, and three months before the first representation of "The Marriage of Figaro," 570,625 livres, with a letter from M. de Calonne, announcing that his further demands would be decided upon by a committee of shipowners. It was this further claim, fixed some time after Beaumarchais' imprisonment in St. Lazare by an order of the king, dated February 12, 1786, at the sum of 800,000 livres, which, added to the two preceding sums, formed a total of 2,275,625 livres; Beaumarchais received this, not, as the reader perceives, in one

sum, but by instalments, and at intervals of several years.*

We have been obliged to enter into these particulars, in order to let it be fully understood that the sum he obtained after his imprisonment in St. Lazare was not a donation from the King, disguised under the form of an indemnification, but the balance of a genuine, well founded claim which had long been recognised by the government.

Notwithstanding all the reparation which the King made to Beaumarchais, this public act, not only of severity but of contempt, performed in a moment of blind anger, had a lamentable effect on the moral position of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" in the eyes of the public. He had been seen for the first time to submit to an insult, and compelled to remain silent, on account of the rank of the offender; his enemies were encouraged by this to attack him, and soon his star, which was beginning to fall, brought him into conflict with a man who was not less bold, and who was at the same time younger and more redoubtable than himself.

Two clever engineers, the brothers Perier, had undertaken to distribute the water of the Seine through every quarter of Paris, in imitation of what

* See the King's order for the payment of 800,000 francs, Appendix, No. 23.

had long been the system in London, by establishing on the heights of Chaillot the fire-engine which is at work there to the present day. They had applied to Beaumarchais, who, being always ready to undertake useful enterprises which were at the same time likely to be profitable, had provided them with funds, and had helped them to organise, under the title of "The Paris Water Company," a society of which he was one of the principal shareholders and one of the directors. The shares, which had at first fallen below par, went up rapidly and considerably in 1785. Several bankers, who had risked a great deal of money in speculating for the fall, had a very great interest in checking and reversing this movement. Mirabeau was then in Paris, having just left the prisons where he had spent so much of his tempestuous youth; he was at the time only known by his work on *lettres-des-cachet*, and his notorious law-suits and love affairs. Poor, and longing to gratify a thousand luxurious tastes, he wandered through society, tottering as it was, *sicut leo rugiens quærens quem devoret*, or, if the reader prefer it, like a knight errant in search of adventures and combats. Intimate with the financiers Panchaud and Clavière, who lent him money, and who were especially annoyed by the rise in the shares of the water company, and supplied by them with information more or less correct, he commenced a campaign against the company of

the brothers Périer in a flaming pamphlet, in which he undertook to open the eyes of the nation as to its true interests, and to prove to them *patriotically* that the fire-engine at Chaillot was a detestable undertaking.

As shareholder and administrator, Beaumarchais had also a *patriotic* interest in proving the contrary. It must be observed that his position was clearer than that of his adversary, as he defended his own speculation, and a society which was indisputably useful. To Mirabeau's pamphlet he answered by one in which, contrary to his custom, he was perfectly calm and moderate, and only occupied himself in contradicting his adversary. Notwithstanding, as it is very difficult to act contrary to one's nature, he introduced a pun which was not in the very best taste. Comparing Mirabeau's pamphlet to the "Philippics," he called them "Mirabelles," and, under an appearance of courtesy, insinuated doubts as to the motives more or less interested which had guided the pen of the friend of Panchaud and Clavière. Nothing more was wanting to rouse a Hercules who longed for wounds and scars. The answer soon appeared. Mirabeau replied in a second pamphlet, in which, almost setting aside the Paris Water Company, he attacked the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" ferociously, spoke against his whole life, and abused him dreadfully in the name of morality and public order. When Mirabeau, the

ravisher of women, defends morality against Beaumarchais; when Mirabeau, who in the dungeon of Vincennes, wrote and sold anonymously the most vile things,* reproaches Beaumarchais with the licentiousness of his manners; when Mirabeau, the future tribune who was to invoke the Gracchi and Marius, calls Beaumarchais to account for his attacks against the orders of the State, he always appears to me amusing rather than impressive.† One circumstance will suffice to give an idea of the good faith of Mirabeau in the quarrel. Amongst the accusations made against Beaumarchais, one of those on which he relied very much consisted in the relations which Beaumarchais maintained with Morande; the friendship of such a man was, he said, an opprobrium for the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." The reader may imagine the rage of Morande, on receiving Mirabeau's pamphlet in London, when we state that he had in his possession the most agreeable letter addressed to him

* We are not alluding to the Vincennes correspondence, which does not deserve to be spoken of in such a manner, and which, besides, was not published by Mirabeau, but of several other cynical works, such as the "Erotika Biblion," "My Conversion," &c., which Mirabeau wrote in prison to procure money, and which, by some strange tolerance, the police assisted him to sell.

† We do not mean to say that Mirabeau, even when he invokes the Gracchi and Marius, is as much of a democrat as he appears. There is more ardour in the form than in the substance of his opinions; at the same time he appears to us much more revolutionary than Beaumarchais.

by Mirabeau himself. When Mirabeau was some time previously in England, and had need of the editor of the "Courier de l'Europe," he invited him to dinner, declared himself his best friend, and paid him the greatest court.* A man must be very eloquent indeed to afford such *levities* in the matter of conscience. These facts induce me to think that there must be some truth in a little detail in Gudin's manuscript, intended to explain the primitive cause of Beaumarchais' attacks.

"The Count de Mirabeau," says Gudin, "lived almost entirely by what he borrowed: he came to see Beaumarchais, they only knew one another by reputation, the conversation between them was lively, animated, and witty. At last the Count, with the levity customary with borrowers of quality, asked Beaumarchais to lend him a sum of *twelve thousand francs*. Beaumarchais refused with that original gaiety which distinguished him. 'But you could easily lend me that amount,' said the Count. 'Without doubt,' replied Beaumarchais; 'but, Monsieur le Comte, as I should have to break off with

* The following is one of these letters from Mirabeau to Morande, not signed, but autograph, and perfectly authentic: "I waited for you yesterday all day, but you forgot me. I am myself the bearer of my letters, my reproaches, and my annoyances, for I desire to see you for myself, and yourself, in reference to various objects. I was writing this note when yours arrived; if you were good-natured you would come and eat a fowl with me without ceremony."

you when the day of payment arrived, I would rather do so at once; I gain twelve thousand francs by it.'"

After Mirabeau's second pamphlet an answer was expected from Beaumarchais. To the great surprise of the public, the latter remained silent. Whether he considered the match was not equal, and that his antagonist was too strong for him, or had too little to lose, or whether he felt that need of rest which age brings to all, even the most warlike, he determined to remain silent. Did he act prudently? That is doubtful; for a new adversary will be shortly seen to take advantage of this sign of prudence, in order to attack Beaumarchais in his turn with unequalled fury.

Four years had passed over this quarrel. Mirabeau had become the great orator and the great statesman of the Constituent Assembly, when one fine day in 1790, fatigued in his turn with the storms of life, he wrote to Beaumarchais the following letter:—

"As my writing cannot displease you, Sir, when it is accompanied by behaviour which you will not disapprove of, I have determined to address myself to you in a direct manner, rather than through intermediaries, in order to be enlightened upon a point which regards you.

"Having almost reached that age, and above all, that mental disposition in which I also wish to think only of my books and my garden, I had in looking over the national estates cast my eyes upon the 'Minims' in the Wood of

Vincennes; I hear that your thoughts are turned in that direction, it is even said that you have made the highest bid; there can be no doubt that if you desire this pretty residence, you will give much more for it than I should, because you are much more able to do so; and that being settled, I should think it very disobliging of me to send up the price of a thing to which I should no longer be able to aspire. Have the kindness, then, to tell if I have been correctly informed, if you are very anxious to make this purchase; and from that moment I withdraw my offers; if, on the contrary, you have only a slight inclination to possess it, or merely a desire to encourage these sales for the good of the State, reserving to yourself to get rid, at a subsequent period, of an estate which is probably too near your present beautiful habitation for you to intend to make it your country house, I am persuaded you will behave to me as I do to you, and that you will not compete to send up the purchase.

"I have the honour to be most sincerely, Sir, &c.,

"MIRABEAU THE ELDER.

"September 17, 1790."

Here is Beaumarchais' answer:—

"I am about to reply to your letter, Sir, with frankness and freedom. I have long been seeking an opportunity of revenging myself on you; you now offer it to me yourself, and I accept it with joy.

"All the motives you mention did indeed influence me in wishing to make the purchase. Another more powerful one was added to them; and although it may appear strange, it was nevertheless the one which decided me. At the age of twelve, when about to make my first communion (you laugh?) I was taken to the 'Minims;' a large picture of the 'Last Judgment,' which was in their vestry, made such an impression on my mind, that I returned to see it very often. An old monk, of much wit, thereupon undertook to tear me away

from the world. He gave me a sermon, every time I saw him, on the large picture, accompanying his sermon with refreshments. I had become very fond of his retreat and his moral lessons, and I went there every holiday. Since this time I have always taken a pleasure in visiting this cloister, and as soon as the estates of our poor shorn ones was offered for sale, I gave directions for outbidding every one for this one. So many motives combined, make this acquisition dear to me; but my vengeance is still more so, and I am no longer so good natured as I was in my childhood. You desire my cloister, I give it up to you, and resign all claims upon it, too happy to place my enemy at last between four walls. I am the only person who could do it, now that there are no more bastilles.

"If in your anger you are still sufficiently generous not to interfere with the salvation of my soul, reserve for me, Sir, the great picture of the 'Last Judgment.' My last judgment upon it is, that it is a very fine piece, and made to honour my chapel. You will thus have your revenge on me, as I have my revenge on you. If you have need of good information, or even of my assistance, to facilitate your purchase, speak, and I will do whatever you wish in the matter; for if, Sir, I am the most implacable of all your enemies, my friends say laughingly that I am the best of all ill-natured men.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

The thanks of Mirabeau were not long forthcoming.

"I must have been beside myself with joy, yesterday, as I in fact was, Sir, not to have answered your kind letter immediately. The candour of the age you recal is shown in it, no less than its gaiety and ingenuity; and never did more engaging form accompany kinder conduct. Yes, certainly, the picture which has remained so vividly im-

pressed on your imagination in the course of a life which must necessarily have somewhat distracted your attention from the 'Last Judgment,' is yours, if I become the owner of this cloister; and to my ambition in this respect is added a prayer—it is that you will come yourself to seek your souvenir of the vestry, and admit that no faults are inexpiable and no anger eternal.

"MIRABEAU THE ELDER.

"September 19, 1790."

A kind letter from Beaumarchais terminates this correspondence.

"I am more touched, Sir, with your letter than I dare confess. Allow me to send to you the good man whom I had intrusted with the settlement of this affair. He was formerly one of the brokers of the municipality; he will explain to you what value your purchase possesses, and what you can do with it. This will enable you to judge, if you do not already know, to what amount you can bid.

"Since my badinage did not displease you, receive now my most sincere assurance that the past has been totally forgotten. Turn my old vestry into a dining-room, and I will accept in it with joy a civic and frugal repast. Thanks to the Revolution, no one feels humiliated now at offering them of such a kind, and we have all become rich from the diminution it has caused in vain expenses which made us poor without giving us any real pleasure. Have good workmen, and let them be good enough to finish their work quickly. It will certainly be excellent if it be only done with rapidity.

"Receive the salutations of the cultivator."

Thus time appeases the most burning animosities. This project of seeking repose in the country was one of the chimeras with which Mirabeau nursed his

imagination in his hours of lassitude: it had no result; the man of battles was to die in the breach; but it appeared to us that this pacific correspondence, in which each of the two former enemies exhibits himself in his true aspect, possessed more sincerity, and consequently more interest than their quarrel.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ANOTHER LAW-SUIT.—EXERCISE OF MARITAL AUTHORITY.—A COMPLAISANT HUSBAND.—BERGASSE, AND HIS MEMORIALS.—VERDICT FOR BEAUMARCHAIS.

In his dispute with Mirabeau on the subject of the Paris Water Company, Beaumarchais had caused the public to look upon him as a man whose strength was beginning to fail. This was encouraging for those who might feel anxious to make a reputation for themselves at the expense of his, and he was not long before he found himself assailed by a new adversary. In February 1787, when he was occupying himself with the opera of "Tarare," of which we shall speak further on, a very large number of copies were circulated in Paris, of a somewhat voluminous and very virulent pamphlet, entitled "Memorial on the Question of Adultery, Seduction, and Defamation on the part of le Sieur Kornman, against la Dame Kornman, his wife, le Sieur Daudet de Jossan, le Sieur Pierre-Augustin, Caron de Beaumarchais, and M. Lenoir, councillor of state, formerly lieu-

tenant-general of police." This Memorial, in a form which was no longer in use, printed without the printer's name, and containing an accusation addressed to the public and not to any court of justice, was simply signed Korman; but the style gave evidence of a pen more skilled than that of an Alsacian banker. As the affair in question had an immense celebrity, in consequence of the circumstances and the persons who were attacked, we must first explain by what *tour de force* an advocate who was then obscure but thirsting for celebrity, had been able to involve Beaumarchais in an action for adultery, with which he had nothing whatever to do and which had been commenced six years before. In October, 1781, the author of "The Barber of Seville," when dining with the Prince de Nassau-Siegen, had been warmly solicited by the Prince and Princess to interest himself in the fate of a young woman, whom her husband had kept for six months shut up in a house of detention, in virtue of a *lettre-de-cachet*, and to unite his exertions to those they were making themselves in her favour. Rendered prudent by experience, Beaumarchais, before mixing himself up in so delicate an affair, asked for all possible particulars. A touching petition, which this young woman wrote from her prison to the President of the Parliament, was shown to him. She was a foreigner, born in Switzerland, without father or mother, and had

been married at the age of fifteen to an Alsacian banker, to whom she brought a portion of 360,000 francs. She had two children, and was *enceinte* with a third. The affairs of her husband were in a bad condition. She had wished to preserve her portion for the sake of her children, and her husband had had her imprisoned through a *lettre-de-cachet* as an adulteress. She met the accusation with a feeble denial, and it appears that it was really well founded; but she claimed the right of defending her fortune and honour before a court of justice, and asked not to be condemned to perish from suffering by having to give birth to her child in a place where mad women and prostitutes were shut up. In order to make Beaumarchais completely decided, they moreover showed him letters written by the husband to the man he accused of having seduced his wife, and introduced the seducer to him; he was an elegant, witty young man, of light morals, named Daudet de Jossan, who was rather intimate with the Prince and Princess of Nassau, and who was grandson of Adrienne Lecouvreur and Marshal Saxe.*

Daudet, through the patronage of the last minister of war, the Prince de Montbarey, had obtained the place, then an important one, of Syndic-royal, attached

* The father of Daudet, director of the salt dépôt of the town of Strasburg, had married Francoise-Catherine-Ursule Lecouvreur, natural daughter of the celebrated tragic actress and Marshal Saxe.

to the town of Strasburg. As this position gave him a certain influence in Alsace, Kornman had received him at his house in Paris. He had fallen in love with Madame Kornman, the husband had resolved what to do under the circumstances, had made his wife's lover his friend, and had profited by his influence with the minister Montbarey, until the period when the retirement of this minister caused Daudet to lose his place and influence. The good-natured and complaisant husband suddenly became transformed into an Othello. Kornman's letters to his wife's lover, in fact, expressed a toleration so ignoble, that Beaumarchais hesitated no longer. He hastened to the ministers, and with that persevering activity which he exhibited in whatever he undertook, he soon obtained the revocation of the *lettre-de-cachet*, and an order from the King enjoining the lieutenant of police, M. Lenoir, to have his prisoner conducted to the house of a surgeon-accoucheur, where she could be at liberty to receive her men of business, and to discuss her interests, in connection with her husband. Thus, the same man who just before had been unable to preserve himself personally from a most arbitrary and insulting act of authority, had sometimes more power than a prince, when the liberty of another person had to be obtained. This is another proof of that social discordance in all things which was preparing the way for the Revolution, and

which we have already called attention to several times in the course of this work. However this may be, Kornman, seeing that his wife was escaping his power, tried to effect a reconciliation with her; five years were passed in abortive attempts to make up the differences, and in commencing law-suits for a separation. In the interval the commercial affairs of the banker became worse and worse, he was obliged to suspend his payments, and his wife, to whom Beaumarchais as a consequence of the first service he had rendered her could no longer refuse advice, had to commence law proceedings against him, in order to preserve her dowry.

Things were in this position when Kornman happened to form the acquaintance of the young advocate Bergasse, who was still unknown, or rather known only by the extreme enthusiasm which he had exhibited in some pamphlets in favour of the magnetic experiments of Mesmer. Whether Bergasse really put faith in the more or less fantastic stories which Kornman told him, whether he perceived a fair opportunity for bringing himself out with advantage, or whether, in fine, he was induced by these two motives together, it is certain that it was he who determined the Alsacian banker to confide to the public the details which one generally likes to keep secret. It was at the instigation of the impetuous Bergasse, that Kornman decided to let the

affair make as much noise as possible, including in the same denunciation his wife and her presumed accomplice, Daudet de Jossan; the lieutenant-general of police, whom Kornman also suspected, rightly or wrongly, of having been his wife's lover, and who, having just given up his place, presented the advantage of being in a position to be attacked usefully, and without danger; the Prince of Nassau even, whom Bergasse was to attack in a second "Memorial;" and finally, but above all, Beaumarchais, the "fearful," the "villanous," Beaumarchais, who was put forward as the working hinge of the most abominable plot against all laws human and divine.

Such was the object of the first Memorial, published in Kornman's name, written by Bergasse, and circulated by thousands throughout Paris. This Memorial, pompous from one end to another, often exaggerated and incorrect, presents, nevertheless, some sufficiently brilliant pages; but as regards logic, reason, and law, it really does not bear examination. It is really a mass of confusion. What do we find in it? A husband who narrates, or rather an advocate who makes a husband relate in an emphatic style the wrongs he imputes to his wife, with an epigraph in Latin verse, taken from Claudian's poem against Ruffinus, an epigraph which was specially directed against Beaumarchais, although he had nothing whatever to do with the

principal fact, namely, the adultery of Madame Kornman. One thing, which for the rest would tend to indicate a certain good faith on the part of Bergasse, at all events, at the commencement of the affair, is, that in his perpetual excitement he forgets every instant that he is clothing in an imposing style, details which reflect but little honour on his client. He might, for example, dispense with showing us that this husband for a year carries his good-nature to the extent of the most shameful tolerance, after which, he has his wife confined as soon as any question arises of a division of property. He might dispense with making this husband utter the *naïve* confession, that if he waited six years before making the disclosure public, he did so because the lieutenant of police, whom he accuses of being one of his wife's lovers, *had promised him a place in the Indies*. Finally, is it not singular that a husband, after having dragged his wife publicly through the mud, after having accused her not only of very grave and very frequent irregularities, but also of swindling, and even of being an accomplice in some affair connected with a murder, which was a perfect romance, should arrive finally at the conclusion that his wife and her portion should be left to him—the portion, apparently, because it was a good thing to have, the wife because, says this amiable husband, she has *erred rather than sinned*, and because he desires

she may live surrounded by the esteem which she may yet deserve? And all this to lead up to an invocation of all the rigour of the law, not only upon the head of the suborner, or suborners, which would have been natural enough, at all events on the part of any other husband, but upon the head of Beaumarchais, against whom no other precise fact is alleged, than that of having helped to obtain from the ministers the revocation of a *lettre-de-cachet*, in favour of a woman who was on the point of being brought to bed in a house of detention. In order to have everything logical, moreover, in the Memorials of Bergasse, we find in them the most ardent declamations against *lettres-de-cachet*.

Excited by the example of Mirabeau, Bergasse leaves him far behind, in violence of language. All the most insulting expressions and withering imputations which rage can inspire, are heaped upon Beaumarchais. And as if it were not enough to call him "*a man whose sacrilegious existence* attests in so disgraceful and flagrant a manner the degree of *profound depravity* to which we have arrived," in another Memorial this advocate, speaking in his own name to Beaumarchais, whom he does not know, whom he has never seen—"*Malheureux tu sues le crime!*"* At an ordinary period and to

* We have stated above that Beaumarchais' unaccustomed prudence in his dispute with Mirabeau had encouraged Bergasse. The

an impartial public, Beaumarchais' answer to these invectives would have appeared crushing, for he contented himself with opposing, as he said to Kornman-Bergasse, Kornman himself; that is to say, that to this husband, so pompous with his sensitiveness, his indignation, and his virtue—to this husband, who, with the pen of Bergasse, enlarged with so much facility on the sacredness of the conjugal tie, he opposed the real husband, the husband who wrote —during the very year in which his wife's relations with Daudet had filled him with indignation *in his Memorial*—letters in which he made of this suborner his friend, his confidant, his patron with the ministers, the architect of his fortune, the friend and habitual companion of his wife. He showed that Kornman deserved to be placed in the very embarrassing dilemma which was subsequently put to him at the hearing by Daudet's advocate: "Either you are the most atrocious calumniator, or you are the vilest of husbands; you must choose between the two."

As for Beaumarchais, after having thus exposed the morality of the plaintiff in its true light, it was not difficult for him to demonstrate in the most

latter, in fact, confesses it ingenuously when he speaks of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" as a man "who, when dragged publicly through the mud by a famous writer whom he had had the impudence to insult, did not dare to raise his head before him, and by his *guilty silence* justified the opprobrium with which he was covered."

incontrovertible manner that there were no reasonable grounds for mixing him up in this accusation of adultery.* Unhappily for him, the public cared very little about who was right or wrong upon the main question, which was insignificant enough in itself, but only troubled itself as to who would conquer in this war to the death, which a new adversary was declaring against Beaumarchais; for after the noise of the first Memorial, Bergasse, desirous of appearing on the stage, and understanding, moreover, that it was scarcely becoming to avoid the responsibility of his attacks any longer, by borrowing the name of Kornman, when every one knew that the Memorial was his own, had positively de-

* As the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" may be looked upon with suspicion in matters regarding women, I have taken pains to find out from his papers, whether he really served Madame Kornman in the character of a *disinterested knight*. I ascertained, first of all, that he had no acquaintance with her when he helped to get her out of prison, and in the next place, that when he assisted her subsequently with his advice in her disputes about property with her husband, he behaved towards her as a friend, and nothing more: she calls him, in her letters, "mon cher papa," and he indeed appears to have played a purely paternal part in connection with her. Accordingly, it was just one of the most praiseworthy and disinterested actions of Beaumarchais' life which procured him the greatest number of insults and annoyances. It is this that makes him exclaim, in his memorials regarding the affair, "Great God! what is my destiny! I have never done any good action which has not caused me anguish, and I only owe all my successes—shall I say the word?—to follies!"

clared himself to be the author; and Beaumarchais having cited him as well as Kornman before the Parliament for defamation, Bergasse had to continue the dispute both in the name of Kornman and in his own. Now, here he possessed several advantages over Beaumarchais. He had yet neither enemies nor enviers; with a bilious temperament, and a very ardent imagination, he had naturally a certain emphatic style, which was proof against the irony of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," and the violence of his periods, which were often forced, but always sonorous, looked like the earnestness resulting from conviction. He was no less skilful than violent, for profiting by circumstances—by the quarrels between the ministry and the Parliament, which caused the administration of justice to be suspended, and made his law-suit drag over nearly two years, he managed to take exactly the same part that Beaumarchais had formerly taken at the time of the Goëzman law-suit, and to connect with this dispute all the pre-occupations of the day. The groundwork of the affair thus disappeared beneath the accessories, and soon in the Memorials of Bergasse, the chief subjects were not M. and Madame Kornman, but the exile of the Parliament, and the villany of Beaumarchais, whom he accused of being sold to the ministers; the liberty of the press, the states-general, and the "villany" of Beaumarchais, who was

declared to be the enemy of their rights. All the idlers naturally took part in this contest, which is one of the great events of the epoch. During the two years which it lasted, nearly four hundred pamphlets were published on the subject, Bergasse introducing into them all the names, more or less unpopular, which he found ready to his pen, and each person mentioned publishing in his turn answers and explanations. Beaumarchais only wrote three Memorials during the Kornman law-suit; they are incontestably much weaker than those he wrote against Goëzman and others. He was in this case so perfectly in the right as to the main question, that he did not know how to defend himself against the declamatory generalities under which it was sought to crush him. It was in vain that his friends advised him to avoid the forms of satire, which would not answer, inasmuch as Bergasse had managed to make of the affair a great question of public morality, in which he put himself forward as the defender of virtue, against a "mass of perverted men:" as public opinion was disposed to accept him in that character, he ought to be deprived of it with seriousness, and met with a violence equal to his own; but Beaumarchais was beginning to grow old, he had habits of intellect which it was now impossible for him to give up. Not satisfied with proving that in all this there was nothing to reproach him

with, which was very true, he allowed himself to make jokes about Kornman, which spoiled his position, and laid him open to the austere philippics of Bergasse.

On his side Bergasse, who writes modestly, "I will carry human eloquence as far as it can go," professes singular opinions as to the right, which, according to his idea, every person enjoyed of attacking the reputation of a celebrated man, and overwhelming him with insults. Let us hear him: "I have, you say, merely written facts which are false; I have, then, incurred all the penalties attached to calumny. Well! even on this supposition (evidently false) M. Kornman would have deceived me; you would have a right to attack him, and to demand satisfaction for his imposture: but I, whose intentions have been so pure—whose conduct has been so frank —whose aim has been so worthy of praise—I shall always be above your reach. . . . . But, you say, we prosecute you, not because you wrote the Memorials of M. Kornman, but because you have represented us in them under the most odious features. . . . . That is to say," cries Bergasse, "that you wish to punish me for being myself, and not any one else; for not having written with your faculties, but with my own. . . . . ." And as the faculties of Bergasse are essentially inclined towards virulence, after having, during two years, accumulated every insult on

Beaumarchais, on M. Lenoir, and on the Prince of Nassau, at the last hearing he administers to them the following peroration: "Let these perverted men learn that I shall never cease pursuing them; that as long as they remain unpunished, I shall not be silent; that I must be sacrificed at their feet, or that they must fall at mine. The altar of justice is at this moment to me the altar of vengeance, and upon this altar—*henceforth fatal*—I swear that there shall never be peace between us; that I will never leave them; that I will rest no more; that I will attach myself to them like remorse to the guilty conscience. And you, who preside over this august tribunal; you, the friend of morals and laws; you, in whom we all admire, &c., &c., *receive my oaths.*" The numerous admirers of Bergasse considered this sublime.

The Parliament accepted the oaths of this impetuous advocate at what they were worth; and though he had carefully and incessantly mixed up the flattery of his judges with invectives against the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," a decree of April 2, 1789, suppressing his Memorials as *false, insulting, and calumnious,* condemned him to pay Beaumarchais a thousand livres damages, and warned him against repeating the offence *under pain of exemplary punishment.* Kornman was sentenced to the same penalties, and moreover, in consideration of

the proofs of his guilty connivance, declared incapacitated for sustaining his accusation of adultery against his wife and Daudet de Jossan.

Parliament must have had a certain amount of courage to give this decision, for the result of this prolonged contest had been to raise against Beaumarchais a universal outcry. Attacked every day in anonymous letters of the most furious description; assaulted once even in the street, he could no longer go out in the evening, without being armed and accompanied. Bergasse, on the contrary, had for the moment become the idol of the public. This multitude, which overflowed the large hall of the Parliament, this multitude, which in the time of the Goëzman law-suit, bore Beaumarchais in triumph, received the news of his victory with murmurs, reserving all its sympathies and all its admiration for his adversary. Nevertheless in this affair his position was incontestably better, both morally and legally, than in the affair with Goëzman; but as he had, perhaps, formerly somewhat abused the favour of public opinion, Providence doubtless wished that he should feel all the bitterness of its injustice.* On the same

* The injustice continued even after Beaumarchais' death. Bergasse having had the advantage of surviving him a long time (he lived until 1832), profited by the advantages of the situation, and although his Memorials were very justly declared false and calumnious by magistrates who certainly had no predilection for the author

day the friends of Bergasse said that his adversary had bought over the Parliament. He had so far bought it over, that I cannot prevent myself from here transcribing an interesting detail, which I find among my papers, and which proves that the true Parliament had nothing in common as to the matter of integrity with the Maupeou Parliament.

In this celebrated action, in which the five or six first advocates of Paris took part, a young barrister, twenty-nine years of age, Dambray, who was afterwards Count Dambray, and Chancellor of France under the Restoration, spoke for the first time as

of "The Marriage of Figaro," three of them have been inserted in a rather well-known collection, published under the title of the "French Bar." The editors of this collection suppressed Beaumarchais' replies, because, say they, "they are merely judicial pleadings of very mediocre quality." That is possible, but it does not render the exclusive publication of Bergasse's very black calumnies the more just. The editors, to console their consciences, add, that Bergasse gives *accurately*, in his Memorials, the contents of Beaumarchais' answers. Nothing in the world can be more inaccurate than this assertion. One thing, on the contrary, which distinguishes Bergasse's Memorials is his ingenious silence with regard to the characteristic facts of the case, and in the manner in which he perpetually, and sometimes eloquently, diverges to facts which are foreign to the question, so that the nature of the law-suit is as completely misrepresented as that of Beaumarchais himself. Those who may wish to gain a better knowledge of both will do well to consult, in addition to Beaumarchais' answers, the less known collection by Mejan, entitled "Causes Célèbres," in which the one in question is analysed with sufficient accuracy.

advocate-general. After the pleadings at the final hearing, Dambray had to give his conclusions, and to separate the case from all the complicated balderdash with which it had been overloaded. Obliged to speak for several hours, and stifled by the heat, the young advocate-general had fainted twice; after each fainting fit, he resumed his argument where he had left it off, with as much presence of mind as if it had not been interrupted, and pursued it with an eloquence which was full of power and lucidity. Without troubling himself about the sudden popularity of Bergasse, or the unpopularity of Beaumarchais, he had arrived at a just conclusion, and in a certain way had dictated to the conscience of the judges the judgment which had just been pronounced.

Several days after this judgment, Beaumarchais felt anxious to satisfy a feeling of gratitude towards Dambray, and not knowing exactly how to act so as to avoid wounding his susceptibility, he had a box left at his porter's lodge, containing a superb cameo and the following anonymous letter, which was not in his own handwriting:—

EXECUTION OF A LEGACY.

"This antique portrait of Cicero, engraved on *péridot*, a fine stone of the first quality after the emerald, was the favourite ring which was always worn by M. d'Emery, the most celebrated antiquary of the eighteenth century. When he

died, he left it in trust to one of his friends, upon condition that he would remit it to the most eloquent man he met: it belongs, then, incontestably to M. Dambray.

"The stone has not been repolished from a feeling of respect, and for fear of altering the perfect likeness of the ancient Cicero before presenting it to the modern."

The next day Beaumarchais had his box returned to him, with the following letter:—

"A little box was remitted to me, Sir, yesterday evening, containing a portrait of Cicero very artistically engraved on a fine stone *of the first quality after the emerald*, as I am informed in a letter which is far too obliging, and in which the writer carries flattery so far as to compare me to the Roman orator; I could only attribute to the enthusiasm of a suitor who had gained his action, and who did not know me, a present which suits me in no respect. I examined my servants to find out the author, and as what I heard from my porter, who recognised your lackey, confirmed my first suspicions, I hasten, Sir, to profit by the discovery to beg of you to take back a jewel which proper delicacy does not permit me to accept.

"Under whatever form a present be offered, it does not cease to be a present, and a magistrate ought never to receive one.

"I have the honour to be, Sir, &c.,

"DAMBRAY."

Beaumarchais replied by protesting that the present was not from him; but the young advocate-general, convinced of the contrary, persisted in his refusal. This is how Beaumarchais bought over the Parliament which had just decided against Ber-

gasse. It is true, however, as has been said, that if he gained his action before the tribunal, he lost it this time before public opinion, and made the fortune of Bergasse, who although declared to be a calumniator in a judicial decision, was indebted to this affair alone for a brilliant celebrity, and found himself elected at once to the constituent assembly, where his celebrity was not maintained.

La Harpe, while declaring himself indignant at the equally odious and absurd calumnies of which Beaumarchais was so often the object, is of opinion that he committed an unpardonable action when he allowed himself, three years after the law-suit, to give the treacherous character in his drama of "The Guilty Mother," the Irish name of Begearrs, intended to recall that of Bergasse, but which, in fact, recalls it slightly enough; and the greater part of Beaumarchais' biographers have mechanically repeated this opinion of the celebrated critic. La Harpe, who introduced into the smallest of his literary quarrels such bitter and obstinate animosity, speaks of such matters now quite at his ease. What! a man to whom you have never done the least harm, whom you do not know, who does not know you, shall have outraged and calumniated you in the most atrocious manner for two years; he shall have excited the most ardent hostility against you, and you are

inexcusable for transforming him into the villain of a melodrama under an Irish anagram! "In truth," says Arnault, with reason, on this subject, "the vengeance was less severe than the outrage which had provoked it. I knew," he adds, "Bergasse and Beaumarchais: nothing could be more opposed than their dispositions; they were both eager for renown, they obtained it in the first instance through writings published on the occasion of a law-suit; but Beaumarchais defended himself in his Memorials, which Bergasse attacked in his. Tormented by bile, Bergasse, though decidedly a good sort of man, was of the most morose disposition. No one, on the contrary, could be more gay than Beaumarchais, who was, whatever may be said, a very honourable man; and, as every one admitted, one of the most amiable that could be met with."

This impartial testimony of Arnault, writing forty years after the event, permits us at least to conclude that if, indeed, Bergasse was at bottom a good sort of man, he conducted himself in this case like an unjust and malicious one; which is not permitted even to the best sort of men. Without reason and without justice, through an ambition for renown, through violence of disposition, he carried his fury against Beaumarchais to the last extremes of invective and calumny; he gave a cruel wound to his reputation, from which it never completely recovered, and when

the Revolution broke out, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," who might have hoped to be received under the new *régime* with some favour, found the period of decadence and unpopularity opening before him.

CHAPTER XXX.

"TARARE."—A PHYSICAL AND METAPHYSICAL PROLOGUE.—A DESCRIPTIVE BALLET.—SALIERI, AND HIS MUSIC. — POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF "TARARE."

THE attacks of Bergasse, which obliged Beaumarchais to descend once more into the judicial arena, surprised him, as we have said, just when he was preparing the first representation of an opera. This work, from its singular title of "Tarare," and from the general opinion that something strange would proceed from the co-operation of Beaumarchais and Salieri, the principal pupil of Gluck, excited public curiosity in the most lively manner. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" still preserved the privilege of dividing the public attention with the most important events of the day. "As soon as it was known," says a journalist, quoted in Grimm's "Correspondence,"* "that the rehearsal of 'Tarare' had commenced, all interest in the great men of the day,

* *Vide* Grimm's "Correspondence," June, 1787. Letter from M. Pitra to one of his friends at Lyons, on the opera of "Tarare."

in ministerial changes, in the provincial assemblies, disappeared before this great phenomenon. 'Tarare' became the sole subject of all conversations; nowhere was anything talked of but 'Tarare.'"

Attacked unexpectedly by Bergasse in the midst of the rehearsals of his opera, Beaumarchais wrote to the minister of the King's household, M. de Breteuil, to request this work might be postponed, "as he was not able," he said, "to think about amusing the public when it was necessary for him to defend his honour against the most injurious calumnies." The minister objected to the postponement, in a letter addressed to M. de la Ferté, in which, after alluding to a conversation he had had on the subject with the author of "Tarare," he speaks of the impatience of the public, which had reached the greatest height, the interests of the opera, which had spent enormous sums on the getting up, "and, finally, a success which," says M. Breteuil, "we are justified in regarding as certain, which can but add to the brilliant literary reputation of the author, and which will thus in itself be a triumph over his adversaries."

Beaumarchais was obliged to give way to the persistence of M. de Breteuil, and the first representation of "Tarare" took place June 8, 1787. "Never," says the journalist already quoted, "never before did any of our theatres see such a crowd as that which besieged all the avenues of the opera the day of the

first representation of 'Tarare.' Barriers raised expressly for the purpose, and protected by a guard of four hundred men, scarcely sufficed to keep it in restraint." The reader sees that Beaumarchais' power of attracting the multitude had undergone no diminution; it was rather increased than otherwise by the noise of the fresh law-suit in which he was engaged. This time the expectation of the public was somewhat deceived: "Tarare" excited much more surprise than admiration. Nevertheless, this work had more success than has been said, and it lived longer than is commonly supposed.

The idea which suggested "Tarare" is one which was not successfully carried out, but it was not a common-place idea; on the contrary, it was an additional proof of that daring originality and tendency to innovation by which Beaumarchais' intellect was so essentially distinguished. To give equal importance in an opera to the poetical, the musical, and the dramatic interest, and to unite with this all the attractions of scenery, machinery, theatrical effects, and dancing; in a word, to realise with a greater variety of means and much more movement, something analogous to those sublime melodramas of ancient Greece, to which all the arts combined contributed their assistance; "to attain thus," says Beaumarchais himself, "those great effects which are so much praised in the ancient Greek spectacles," such was

the problem which the author of "Tarare" had proposed to himself. To resolve this problem, supposing that it can be resolved in the present day, to deprive music of the absolute supremacy which it assumes in an opera, and to reduce it to being nothing more in a drama than an additional ornament, it would be necessary in the first instance that the poetry itself should possess high merit. Now Beaumarchais was far from being a poet in the strict sense of the term; his versification, except in some rare exceptions, is of the most mediocre description, and the embarrassment he experiences in writing verse, re-acts upon the idea he wishes to express, weakens it, and so completely crushes it, that one is quite astonished to find the author of "The Barber of Seville" writing dialogue in "Tarare" which is sometimes so trivial as to border upon platitude.

Not contented with deceiving himself grossly as to his aptitude for writing a sustained work in verse, Beaumarchais had taken a sort of pleasure in setting himself every kind of difficulty to overcome. He had aimed at producing an opera libretto, which was to be not only poetical and dramatic, but also philosophical, and even scientific, the author substituting for the Greek mythology a new mythology of his own. "The exact sciences," says M. Saint-Marc Girardin, who in a few lines has given a very judicious and very subtle criticism of "Tarare,"—"the exact

sciences were then in fashion; every one praised their clearness and certainty, every one exclaimed that there would be no perfect systems of morals and philosophy until they were approximated to geometry. Beaumarchais imagined that poetry would benefit then by being approximated to physics."* We will describe the canvass on which this strange mixture of fairy tale and drama, philosophy and science, was embroidered. In reading Hamilton's pretty tale, entitled, "Fleur d'Epine," Beaumarchais had been struck by the grotesque name of Tarare, which the author gives to the principal character, and the effect produced by this name on those who hear it pronounced. Besides, the fact that "Tarare," in Hamilton's tale is a good type of the obscure, but witty and ingenious man, struggling against all kinds of obstacles, and surmounting them by his skill—a character which the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was always fond of representing, from its bearing a certain resemblance to himself—he thought the name of "Tarare" would have the double advantage of making the bill attractive, and of enabling him to introduce plenty of *coups de théâtre* in the piece, if he employed it in the same manner as Hamilton, but with a different effect. The latter only derives comic results from it, while Beaumarchais gives the name to

* "Essais de Littérature et de Morale," par M. Saint-Marc Girardin," vol. i. p. 120.

a warrior who is an object of dread to a tyrant, this tyrant never hearing it pronounced without flying into a passion and committing some act of violence which produces a fresh complication in the drama, otherwise the name is almost the only thing which the author of "Tarare" borrows from Hamilton; the rest of his fable bears no resemblance to the tale of "Fleur d'Epine." It is taken to a great extent from a tale translated from the Persian, and entitled, "Sadak and Kalasrade;" but as Beaumarchais was desirous of putting more *philosophy* into his opera than the Persian author, he started from a higher point. In a prologue of the most strange kind, he undertook to show the "Genius of the reproduction of beings or Nature," occupied in concert with the "Genius of Fire which presides over the sun, Nature's lover," in creating beings. These two genii manufacture in succession the different characters who figure in the opera. After hesitating between two shadows, before deciding which of them is to be king, the Genius of Fire "lays his hands upon them," makes one of them, the "Emperor Atar, King of Ormus, despot of Asia," and the other an obscure soldier. This soldier, who is to be "Tarare," is intended to represent the triumph of virtue and intelligence over the gifts of birth and chance. He will find himself the object of Atar's tyranny, who takes his wife away from him, and wishes to kill him as a re-

ward for the glory he has acquired in fighting for him; he will also burn to defeat the astute machinations of the chief of the Brahmins. He will surmount every obstacle by his courage, and will raise himself from the most obscure rank to the highest point in public favour. Like "Figaro," but much more virtuous and much more lively, and with a turban and sabre, he will defend his wife against the attempts of the King Atar, "a man of fierce and unbridled passions," in the words of the programme. More liberally rewarded even than Figaro, Tarare will be forced by the people to ascend the throne in place of the ferocious Atar, who poisons himself, and all this in order to exhibit with additional force the moral of the poem, which is summed up in these four philosophical verses, which Nature and the Genius of Fire return at the end to sing, *majestically*, in Beaumarchais' words, but which they must have had some trouble in singing *melodiously* :—

Mortel, qui que tu sois, prince, brahme, ou soldat,
Homme, ta grandeur sur la terre
N'appartient point à ton état,
Elle est toute à ton caractère.*

Such was the subject by means of which the author

* Mortal, whoever thou art, prince, brahmin, or soldier,
Man, thy greatness on the earth
Does not belong to thy calling,
It is all in thy disposition.

of "The Marriage of Figaro" proposed to realise his plan of an intimate and complete union of poetry, music, drama, and ballet, in one work. The prologue is the most ambitious part of the opera, but at the same time the weakest; it was the part Beaumarchais cared most about, and the one which expired the first: when "Tarare" was revived for the third time under the Republic, the prologue had already been suppressed. It is difficult to understand how a man with so much wit as Beaumarchais could deceive himself so far as to think the public could find any attractions in a scientific dialogue between Nature and the Genius of Fire, creating beings according to the laws of attraction and gravitation, or, better still, according to the atomic theory, and singing such deplorable verses as the following:—

Froids humains, non encore vivants,
Atomes perdus dans l'espace,
Que chacun de vos éléments
Se rapproche et prenne sa place
Suivant l'ordre, la pesanteur
Et toutes les lois immuables
Que l'éternel dispensateur
Impose aux êtres, vos semblables.

The ballet of this prologue was not less strange than the poetry, for it consisted partly of "winds let loose, which, in raging, form dances of the most violent and agitated description." In spite of the

fanaticism of his friendship for Beaumarchais, Gudin says to us, with naïveté, in his manuscript: "I did not conceal from him that I considered it impossible to set this prologue to music; but," he adds with not less naïveté, "Salieri, who had been educated in a school which was accustomed to overcome difficulties, managed to do it." It must have been a difficult task. Beaumarchais had first presented his libretto to Gluck, who was of opinion, like himself, that music occupied too important a place in an opera; but who, doubtless, discovered that Beaumarchais was assigning to him a part which was too slight or too difficult, and who proposed his pupil Salieri as his substitute. The latter was then at Vienna; he was sent for to Paris, Beaumarchais invited him to stop at his house, and loaded him with kindness, as if to make amends to him for the laborious task he was imposing upon him.* The com-

* Twenty years after the period at which we have arrived, and six years after Beaumarchais' death, Salieri, who preserved a lively recollection of the agreeable hospitality he had received from him, wrote, from Vienna to the daughter of the author of "Tarare," who had become Madame Delarue, a letter dated October 5, 1805, from which I extract a few lines in reference to the period of the composition of the opera in question. These lines give what appears to me a graceful and accurate representation of the calmness and serenity which characterised the private life of Beaumarchais, who in public was so perpetually stirring, and who was the object of so many attacks and calumnies. The Franco-Italian jargon of Salieri gives, if I mistake not, an additional attraction to the little picture: "Vous êtes encore,

poser could only execute it by sacrificing himself. From paying too much attention to his idea, that the

écrit-il, devant mes yeux, Madame, cette aimable enfant, cette jolie Eugénie, pleine d'esprit et de grâces. Je suis logé chez votre célèbre *papa* et votre adorable *mamma*, qui m'ont comblé de tant de faveurs et de *gentilesses;* nous deux nous sommes après midi au piano à jouer des sonates à quatre mains. A deux heures, Monsieur ou Madame de Beaumarchais entre dans le cabinet et nous dit: 'Allons dîner, mes enfants.' Nous dînons; je vais *après un peu à me promener*, à lire les gazettes au Palais-Royal ou à quelque théâtre. Je rentre de bonne heure. Quand Monsieur de Beaumarchais n'est pas chez lui, je monte au second, dans mon appartement; je *mette* au lit quelquefois mon domestique, Allemand ivrogne; je me couche dans une chambre où je vois de mon lit, en travaillant tous les jours, l'aurore avec un céleste plaisir. Vers dix heures, Monsieur de Beaumarchais vient chez moi, je lui chante ce que j'ai fait de notre grand opéra; il m'applaudit, il m'encourage, il m'instruit avec une manière paternelle. Tout semblait si tranquille. . . . ."

"You are still, Madame, in my eyes," he writes, "that amiable child; that pretty Eugenie, so full of wit and grace. I stayed with your celebrated papa and your adorable mamma, who loaded me with favours and politeness; we two used to sit down in the afternoon at the piano, and play sonatas, arranged as duets. At two o'clock M. or Madame de Beaumarchais came into the room, and said to us, 'Let us have dinner, my children;' we dined; I went out afterwards to take a walk, to read the papers in the Palais Royal or to some theatre. I came in early. When M. de Beaumarchais was not at home, I went up to the second floor to my apartment; sometimes I put my servant, a drunken German, to bed; I slept in a room, whence, working as I did every day, I saw the dawn from my bed with a heavenly pleasure. Towards ten o'clock M. de Beaumarchais came into my room; I sang to him as much as I had composed of our grand opera; he applauded me, encouraged me, and gave me his instructions in quite a paternal manner. Everything seemed so tranquil. . . . ."

demands of the musician generally exercise a disastrous effect on an opera, not only on the words and ideas, which they extinguish or enfeeble to an unlimited extent, but also on the *ensemble* and the action, which they paralyse or destroy. Beaumarchais arrived at the other extreme, and said to his composer, "Write me music which will be subservient and not dominant, all its effects being made subordinate to the progress of my dialogue and the interest of my drama." Salieri wrote him music, which was so subservient that it became insignificant. "The music of 'Tarare,'" says a contemporary critic, "will add nothing to the reputation of the author; it is generally considered very inferior to that of the 'Danaïdes.' The few songs which it contains are of the most obvious and common-place description, the recitative is almost always insipid and fatiguing from its monotony. Some of the choruses are highly effective, and sometimes contain a melody which we regret not to find in the songs and dance music. Two or three *morçeaux*, such as that of Calpigi in the third act, are really the only agreeable things in the music of this opera." *

* These couplets, which are sung by the eunuch Calpigi, "Je suis né natif de Ferrare," are treated in a lively and original manner; they became sufficiently popular for a parody to be written, containing a very false and very malicious biography of Beaumarchais, which was sung to the same air, and which commenced thus, "Je suis né

And nevertheless this opera of "Tarare," with its poor music, and more than mediocre poetry, possessed, from the originality of its construction, from its unexpected, rapid, and sudden scenic effects, from its combination of drama, comedy, fairy-tale, ballet, dancing, philosophy, and physics, a certain peculiar *ensemble* which did not fail to gain a hold on the public, as is mentioned by the very critic we have just quoted.

"This work," he says, "is one of the most singular conceptions I am acquainted with. . . . . The author will always have the merit of having introduced in this opera an action, the progress of which resembles no other, and of having had enough talent to make it contain a good lesson for sovereigns who abuse their power. . . . . After telling the truth to ministers and nobles in his comedy of

natif de Lutèce." In this same opera of "Tarare" we might also mention some airs as possessing certain lyric qualities, which, however, are not sustained; for instance, the passage commencing with these lines:—

Ainsi qu'une abeille,
Qu'un beau jour éveille,
De la fleur vermeille
Attire le miel.

I remember that a woman, who was celebrated for her beauty, and, the most attractive of all women, from her amiability and grace, Madame Récamier had, after a lapse of fifty years, retained in her mind and in her ear the recollection of this melody, the verses of which are turned with greater felicity than is generally the case with Beaumarchais' poetry.

"The Marriage of Figaro," he had yet to do the same to priests and kings. M. de Beaumarchais was the only person who could dare to do so, and perhaps he was the only person to whom it could be permitted."*

After the eighteenth representation of "Tarare," in September, 1787, Beaumarchais wrote to Salieri, who had just started again for Vienna: "At last, my dear Salieri, you receive your superb score; I may well call it superb, for we have reached the eighteenth representation without the public ceasing for one moment to hurry in crowds to hear it. On the 8th of this month, the great day at St. Cloud, you drew 4200 francs, and last year, on the same day, an excellent work only produced 600 francs.

"Ah! bravo, caro Salieri!†

"Remember me to the giant named Gluck."

In December 1787, Grimm's "Correspondence" tells us that the public went in crowds to the opera of "Tarare" as on the first night. "The spectators" says the journalist, "who arrive in fresh crowds at each representation of this opera, listen to it with a silence and a sort of wonder, of which there has been no previous example at any theatre."

* Grimm's "Correspondence," already quoted.

† In allusion to the refrain of Calpigi's song in "Tarare."

This represents to us very well the impression of surprise and interest, without admiration, which this strange work produced. After a success which, it is seen, lasted rather a long time, the opera of "Tarare" was revived, for the first time after the Revolution in 1790, at the period of the famous fête of the Federation, which attracted all the patriots from the departments to Paris. Beaumarchais added to it, under the title of "Coronation of Tarare," almost an entire act, which has never been published, and which gives us a singular indication of what was then foremost in the public mind; politics are seen to be invading everything, even the opera.

In the first "Tarare," of 1787, the hero was simply proclaimed king, with this recommendation from Calpigi:

> "Reign over thy people, who love thee,
> With justice and with equity."

In 1790 Beaumarchais felt called upon to make "Tarare" a constitutional king, and to give to his coronation in this capacity all possible brilliancy. In the fifth act, then, the scene changed, and represented the "Temple of Brahma," in which the following *cortége* was seen in procession:—

"National March. — Soldiers in good order. Four members of the assembly of the people: the first a soldier, the second a member of the college of Brahmins, the third

a citizen, the fourth an agriculturist, are seen bearing an altar, on which is inscribed, "Altar of Liberty."

"Four other members, arranged in the same manner, carry a great book with this inscription on the cover, 'Book of the Law.' A large crown of gold is placed on this book. Two other members bear the royal purple cloak with gold stars; two others the sceptre and hand of justice. The remainder follow in a mass. Tarare and Astazie ascend the throne.

"After Tarare had been duly crowned, all the 'orders of the state,' says the libretto, 'take one another by the arm, advance together in a circle, and repeat enthusiastically in chorus:

"'King, we place our liberty
At the feet of thy supreme virtue.
Govern thy people, who love thee,
With justice and with equity.
They deposit in thy hands, of themselves,
Their redoubtable authority.'"

These two last verses were intended to lay down the principle of the sovereignty of the people. Before making his reservations as a monarchist who is a friend of law and order, the author of "Tarare" is naturally obliged to conciliate the good wishes of the "advanced patriots," by considerable concessions to the ideas of the moment.

"*Bonzes*," says the libretto of 1790, "followed by some *Brahmin virgins*,* advance to the foot of Tarare's throne, and sing:—

'Unfortunate priests of the religion of Brahma,
Are we condemned to live without happiness?

* This association of Bonzes and Brahmin virgins is, perhaps, somewhat forced; but Beaumarchais did not look at the matter very closely.

TARARE (*rising*).

'Of so much forced retirement
Let the barriers be broken;
Let Hymen, with his soft chains,
Give to all of you prosperous days:
Happy people, the true citizens
Are husbands and fathers.'

"All the assembly raise their hands in token of approbation."

Here we have permission to marry, granted to priests. As to the question of divorce, Beaumarchais shows himself equally agreeable to the desires of the philosophical patriots. The eunuch Calpigi, who is married very unduly to Spinette, advances with her to the foot of Tarare's throne. They sing a duet petitioning for a divorce; Tarare replies by a recitative, granting a divorce. "Here follows," says the libretto, "*a picturesque dance representing, the sentiments of divorce, or of persons who separate and contract other engagements.*"

A third question presents itself, which also agitated every mind in 1790: *that of the emancipation of the negroes.* About this question even the defenders of the Revolution were divided, several of whom, with Barnave at their head, feared the effect of a sudden emancipation upon the safety of the colonists, while Brissot and Robespierre proclaimed with triumphant success in the clubs, this maxim: "Perish the

colonies rather than a principle."* Beaumarchais found himself rather embarrassed. The emancipation of the negroes (and this is a good indication of the ideas of the period) appeared to him a question about which there was much more room for hesitation than about those of the marriage of priests and divorce. He avoided the difficulty in the following manner. A deputation of negroes from Zanguebar have to throw themselves at the feet of Tarare, and describe the miseries of slavery, without precisely begging for their liberty. Tarare rises and sings *majestically* :—

"No more wretchedness among us,
Horrid despotism was committing outrages upon nature:
Our laws will avenge this iniquity;
All of you be happy, arise!"

Here the *majestic* Tarare behaves rather equivocally. He says, "All of you be happy," instead of saying, "All of you be free;" and after having thus evaded the question, he makes the negroes sing and dance in celebration of the "gentle slavery" promised them by the kindness of the whites.†

* It is a complete error, and one rather widely adopted, to attribute this expression to Barnave; he maintained precisely the contrary.

† In this part occurred a couplet of some grotesqueness, sung by a negro, which Salieri, who was then at Vienna, was to set to music, with the remainder. In sending it to him, Beaumarchais added these remarks, which prove to us that, as he was a musician himself, he frequently took part in the labours of the composer.

After having thus granted to the most ardent patriots all he thinks possible, the author of "Tarare" at last feels it necessary to do something in support of authority, by alluding to those frequent riots which, from 1790 to 1791, put the vigilance of Lafeyette and Bailly to so rude a test. The new *coup de théâtre*, by which this was to be accomplished, was as follows:—

"'A mob in disorder and ungovernable' says the libretto, 'runs forward and fills the place.' A herald-at-arms presents himself, accompanied by several magistrates, opposes its progress, and says to it:—

"Here," he writes to Salieri, "are some ideas for the negro's little air. These excitable people do not sing like others. They display a restlessness, a trepidation in singing, which must necessarily be imitated when it has to be reproduced on the stage." And he accompanies this with a suggestion for an air written down by himself from a negro melody. Let us quote, for the benefit of the curious, this couplet, which had to be sung by a negro from Zanguebar in 1790:—

"Hola! doux esclavage
Pour Congo, noir visage,
Bon blanc, pour nègre il est humain.
Nous, bon nègre, a cœur sur la main.
Nous pour blanc
Sacrifie,
Donner sang,
Donner vie,
Priant grand fétiche Ourbala
Pour bon grand peuple qu'il est là.
Ourbala! l'y voilà. . . ."

(*Montrant les Spectateurs.*)

"L'y voilà! la, la, la, la, la."

"In the name of the country,
Which prays you and begs you,
Return to your duty: at the accents of my voice,
People, disperse, for the third time."

Chorus of PEOPLE, *in disorder.*

"Everything is changed. Whatever be ordered,
We will obey no one."

"The magistrate makes a signal.—March of armed soldiers in close order, with a banner bearing this verse in letters of gold on a red ground:—

'Liberty is not the abuse of one's rights.'

"Second march of a group of peaceful citizens. Blue banner, with this verse in white:—

'Liberty consists in obeying the laws alone.'

"Third march of a group of young cultivators of both sexes, crowned with flowers, and bearing corn and fruits. Pink banner, with this distich in green:—

'From liberty without licence
Springs happiness, springs abundance.'

"Fourth march of a group of the priests of Death, preceded by a tamtam, or Indian gong, suspended and carried by two priests, thus forming a kind of tocsin. Black banner, with letters of silver and the following legend:—

'Licence, abuse of liberty,
Are the sources of crime and poverty.'

"Urson has put himself at the head of the soldiers as they have passed; Tarare puts himself at the head of the peaceful citizens; Astazie has joined the young cultivators of both sexes.

"'This imposing march,' says the libretto, 'makes the people *retire with gentleness*, they reappear with *modesty* at the end of the general march,' and Tarare sings as follows:—

'My friend, let us pity their errors,
Victims of some wretch!
When our good people are agitated,
Some one always misleads them.'"

The opera then ended, as in the printed text, with a loud clap of thunder, followed by the appearance of Nature and the Genius of Fire descending from heaven on the car of the Sun.

Thus arranged to suit the taste of the day in 1790, the last act of "Tarare" had been presented first of all to the Mayor of Paris, Bailly, who, after examining it, wrote at the end of the manuscript the following note:—

"I see no objection to permitting and preparing the representation of this 'coronation,' with the exception of two verses which M. de Beaumarchais has promised to alter and tone down.

"BAILLY.

"June 22, 1790."

One would hardly suspect which these two verses were that appeared too strong for the Mayor of Paris. To believe a note of Gudin, written at the head of the manuscript of this "coronation," they are the two following verses from the original opera, which served as a transition to the supplementary act added by Beaumarchais:—

"We have the best of kings;
Let us swear to die under his laws."

Thus in June 1790 the political situation was already so critical, that this honest Sylvain Bailly, himself a monarchist, and who himself afterwards showed so much courage in the presence of death, considered it dangerous, to risk two verses on the stage which might pass for an eulogium of Louis XVI. "Tarare," with its political supplement, was to be revived the very day of the fête of the 14th July; various accidents caused this revival to be delayed until August 3. The piece was brought out finally at the opera, before an enormous audience and in the midst of a frightful disturbance. The colonial party, on the one side, were indignant with Beaumarchais' apparent concessions; the anti-slavery party, on the other, were not less indignant at his reticence; those who were then called the aristocrats, and those who were styled more particularly the patriots, were equally dissatisfied. Each of the contending parties had their sympathies wounded. The members of one hissed the scene of the divorce, and that of the marriage of priests, in an outrageous manner; the others, while applauding this concession to the spirit of the time, became irritated with the allusions directed against riots, and with the tirades in favour of monarchy which still existed in "Tarare," especially the one in which the hero, dispersing the

soldiers who wished to assassinate the Sultan Atar, says to them:—

"Do you forget, soldiers who usurp power,
That the respect of kings is your first duty?"

Lafayette and Bailly were obliged to make the national guard interfere to re-establish order. However, the pit in general agreed sufficiently with the mixed ideas presented by Beaumarchais, if I am to judge from this letter, addressed to the author of "Tarare," under date of August 4, 1790, by a patriot named Rivière, who was very moderate in his opinions, although very warm in his language:—

"Sir," writes the patriot to Beaumarchais, "without having the honour of being known to you, I venture to take the liberty of telling you that I was perfectly shocked yesterday at the first representation of the revival of the opera of 'Tarare,' by the abominable noise—by the yelling and hissing—which a band of robbers presumed to make, who had escaped from the prisons of the Châtelet, and who are paid to introduce their venom even into theatrical performances, or else by a pestilential remnant of aristocrats, who are furious against any one who can contribute to the welfare of the state and that of the people."

The patriot Rivière ends by declaring that the "pit will at last go up to the boxes, and that he will himself make the motion and carry it into execution." It is seen, however, that he is a fair representative of the *juste-milieu* of the time.

In spite of the clamour of the extreme parties,

Beaumarchais showed much energy in keeping "Tarare" in its constitutional monarchical form, when necessary even taking legal measures against those actors who allowed themselves to modify some of the details, and the piece remained on the stage in this form until August 10, 1792, when the constitutional monarchy was swept away. Under the Republic, after the Reign of Terror, the opera wished to revive "Tarare." Beaumarchais was at this time a refugee at Hamburgh, and placed, in spite of himself, on the list of emigrants. He commissioned Madame de Beaumarchais to oppose this revival; but as the opera persisted, it was necessary to capitulate. To the utter despair of the author, his physical and metaphysical prologue on "Nature and the Genius of Fire creating beings" was first of all cut out. Madame de Beaumarchais did her utmost to console him for this, with all those delicate suggestions which women of wit know so well how to employ in such a case. "This prologue," she writes to him in September 1795, "is of too high a philosophy for the individuals who now compose the audience: the public taste has changed; the minds of the spectators are no longer the same; the sublime is quite thrown away upon them." But if the "sublime prologue" was out of place in 1795, the constitutional monarchical ending of "Tarare" was still more so. It was necessary, then, to give a new termination to this opera, and to

dish it up with republican sauce. In Beaumarchais' absence, the task was undertaken by one of his friends, Framery.

After the sultan had stabbed himself, and just when the people were offering the throne to "Tarare," the latter, who had become a republican, exclaimed—

"The throne! what do you venture to say?
When for your happiness tyranny expires,
You would wish for another king!

URSON.

And what other power could govern us?

TARARE.

The law!
Learn now to enjoy the good which Heaven prepares for you.
Freed from a detested yoke,
Preserve your liberty!

CHORUS.

Long live Tarare! long may he live!
He restores to us our liberty."

There were other modifications which excited rather warm complaints among the journals of the conventional party; for instance, when the people rises against the tyrant of Ormuz, a citizen sang the following:—

"Let the tyrant be the object of your vengeance,
Of his long abuse of power
All the people are at length fatigued."

Now Paris was at this moment very much disgusted with a power which was already in decay, and

which, after many acts of cowardice, criminality, and tyranny, submitted to as well as imposed, could only resign itself with much pain to giving up its place to a new power. "Applause," writes Madame de Beaumarchais, "was lavished upon the alterations in the conclusion, but not exactly in the sense we intended; for all that is said to the tyrant of Ormuz was applied to the Convention. The piece has been played three times, and the crowd has been prodigious."

The archæologian Millin, who then edited the "Journal Encyclopédique," wrote in this journal a violent attack upon the anti-Conventional applause with which some of the verses, addressed by Framery to "Tarare" had been received. In entering into an explanation with him he wrote—

"I do not want the theatres to become demagogic lecture-rooms; but never, without experiencing a just indignation, can I see persons rise up with so much levity and so much facility in our theatres against a constitution which cost us so many sacrifices, and for which so many thousands of our fellow citizens are about to shed their blood. You cannot consider it a crime on my part, if I think the suppression of some verses, which are not very striking, be very unimportant, while it is very important, indeed, not to set forth criminal principles which excite applause more criminal still." *

* This took place in September, 1795, at the period of the promulgation of the Constitution of the Year III., with the decrees which forced the people to re-elect two thirds of the members of the Convention. The reader is aware that these were the decrees which a month afterwards produced the Thirteenth of Vendémiaire.

This third revival of "Tarare," in September 1795, was followed by a fourth, which took place in November 1802, under the consulate, after Beaumarchais' death: "Tarare" had further modifications to undergo, of which I have not been able to find any trace. Finally, under the Restoration, in 1815, this opera appeared a fifth time on the horizon, but considerably mutilated, cut down from five acts to three, and again dressed up to suit the taste of the day by some one or other. After having been simply and purely monarchical, then constitutional-monarchical, then republican, the opera of "Tarare" became much more monarchical than at the period of its first production. Instead of killing himself, and giving up his place to Tarare, the ferocious Atar, defended by him against the anger of the people, consented to forgive all the evil he had done to this hero, and all the good he had received from him; he conferred the command of the army upon him, and restored his wife to him. Tarare prostrated himself at his feet, and swore fidelity to him; the people did the same, and everything was arranged as pacifically as possible.

"All that was remarkable in 'Tarare,'" says a writer in 'La Minerve,' who was much annoyed at the last change, 'has been cut out; certain of the *mots* appear, above all to have shocked the official poet, who, moreover, has not allowed a single philosophical observation to remain. Beaumarchais' work certainly would not be proof against a severe examina-

tion on the side of good taste; scenes full of interest, highly dramatic situations, dialogue which is sometimes full of spirit and daring, do not excuse numerous improprieties, strange inaccuracies, and too frequently a barbarous style. But by mutilations without limit, without taste, without object, it was necessary to make of a work which had at all events the merit of being amusing, the most tedious drama which has appeared since 'Panurge.'" *

I think the series of revivals and metamorphoses of Beaumarchais' opera was finally brought to an end in 1819. The reader sees that this work, in spite of all its faults, nevertheless possessed more vitality than is generally thought. To last through thirty-two years with mediocre music and the weakest poetry, "Tarare" must certainly have possessed a certain powerful dramatic interest—a certain originality of construction, which is admitted by all who have seen this opera represented, although it is difficult to form any clear idea of it by simply reading it. However this may be, it is hardly possible that "Tarare" will ever be resuscitated a sixth time. The last transformation finished it, and since it now appears to be decidedly dead, we will leave its ashes in peace, to follow the author through the fresh storms which the Revolution was preparing for him.

* Minerve Française, vol. v, February 8, 1819.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BEAUMARCHAIS' HOUSE AND GARDEN.—NAPOLEON AND BEAUMARCHAIS' DAUGHTER.—VISITORS TO THE GARDEN.—BEAUMARCHAIS IN AN EMEUTE.—CHENIER'S "CHARLES IX."—MADEMOISELLE EUGENIE'S ROUND.—"LA MERE COUPABLE."

THE 14th July, 1780, Beaumarchais was occupied in building in front of, and very near to the Bastille, as if in defiance of this stronghold, a superb and charming dwelling. He had bought from the city, in 1787, all that portion of land which now forms the left line of the boulevard which bears his name, as you approach by the boulevard St. Martin, taking the line opposite the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule, and continuing it to the Place de la Bastille. It was a lengthened rectangular space, of about one acre in extent, in which he proposed, like Sir Walter Scott, another literary builder,* "to exercise his creative

* Beaumarchais and Sir Walter Scott would not have agreed with the witty Voltaire, who says, in one of his letters, "We great wits are not great builders, and we ground it on the verses of Horace:—

'Ædificare casas, plaustello adjungere muros
Si quem delectet barbatum insania verset.'

"Monsieur de Gombaut and I have resolved not to build till the

power upon his mother earth," and to build a house, which should have no more resemblance to other houses than "The Marriage of Figaro" had to other comedies. He succeeded, but not without expending a great sum of money. The architect Lemoyne had at first given him a plan, which amounted to three hundred thousand francs. This primitive plan led him, little by little, to an expenditure of *one million six hundred and sixty-three thousand francs.* Trust then to architects, especially when they have to do with an imaginative man like Beaumarchais, who desires, as he somewhere says, to build *a house that shall be cited*, and who does not look too closely at the expensive consequences of each embellishment! When this celebrated house, of which it may be said *materiam superabat opus*, was bought up in 1818 for the public convenience, the municipality, which considers very little the artistic value of property, paid for this, to the heirs of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," five hundred thousand francs. In this it must be again acknowledged that Beaumarchais, so often decried for his successful speculations, was more an artist than a speculator.

times return when the stones put themselves one on the other to the sound of the lyre. I do not know if Apollo was disgusted with this business, after being so badly paid for the walls of Troy; but it appears to me his favourites do not devote themselves to it, and that their genius leads them to other things than making large buildings.

Madame de Beaumarchais has preserved to us, in a letter to one of her friends, a conversation which seems almost stenographed, between the conqueror of Austerlitz and the daughter of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," upon the subject of this house, which during the Empire there was a talk of pulling down to lengthen the boulevard, but which was not pulled down until the Restoration. This dialogue took place in 1809, at a fête given to the Emperor by the city of Paris.

"It was not," Madame de Beaumarchais wrote, "a simple feeling of curiosity which induced my daughter to be at the fête; her desire was to speak to the Emperor, and to take advantage of the circumstance, if his Majesty addressed her, to present to him a petition relative to our house, which had been threatened with being pulled down for three years, marked to be so, since the preceding year, and yet whose fate remained uncertain. My daughter has succeeded; the Emperor spoke to her. Here is a part of the dialogue. 'What is your name?' 'I am the daughter of Beaumarchais.' 'Are you married?' 'To M. Delarue, one of the administrators of excise, and brother-in-law to General Mathieu Dumas.' 'Have you any children?' 'Two boys and one girl.' 'Did your father leave you his large fortune?' 'No, Sire, the Revolution nearly ruined us.' 'Do you live in his beautiful house?' This was just the point gained, she seized the opportunity with address and wit, saying, that was what she wished to call his Majesty's attention to, that she and all her family were excessively injured by the state of things resulting from the project the government appeared to have adopted, that during the three years the pulling down of our house had been spoken of, we had

lost a great many of our lodgers; that we had thought it right to suspend all repairs, which caused great damage to the house, and great annoyance to the family, &c. To which the Emperor replied: 'Well, it shall be valued, and you shall be paid the amount; but it cost an immense sum, and we do not pay for follies,' &c. During the whole time my daughter was speaking, as it were in an under tone, the Emperor leant down and had his head close to the ivory shoulder of the lady, who finished by giving the petition which she had provided herself with at all risks. What gives us great pleasure is, that we know now what to expect, and that my children will act in accordance."

If, in point of speculation, Beaumarchais, as Napoleon said, committed a *folly*, he succeeded in building a house that persons went to see as a curiosity. In coming by the boulevard, you saw on the left, at the end of the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule, a wall surmounted by a terrace planted with trees, in the style of the terrace by the side of the water in the garden of the Tuileries. At the extremity of this terrace appeared in the midst of trees a temple of a round form, surmounted with a dome; upon the dome a little terrestrial globe, bearing the inscription, "*orbi*," and across it, in the form of a weathercock, a large gilt feather, which made it turn with the wind. On the façade of the temple you read these words: *To Voltaire*, and below, this line from "Henriade:"

"Il ôte aux nations le bandeau de l'erreur."

Proceeding along the terrace you reached the entrance, which looked upon the boulevard, and opened into an immense spherical court, in the centre of which was a rock covered with creeping plants, and surmounted by a figure of the Gladiator. On one side of this court was the house, presenting a semicircular *façade*, with arcades and columns, which, to judge by a drawing from which I take this description, would form an original and imposing *ensemble:* at the other end of the court was the entrance to the garden, closed by an elegant gate. The interior of the house was arranged in the same original and sumptuous style; there were to be remarked in it, under-ground kitchens, immense cellars, elegant staircases, with balustrades of mahogany and brass rails, spacious apartments decorated with as much taste as magnificence, a billiard-room with seats for the spectators, a vast *salon* completely round, lighted by one immense window and by a cupola at an elevation of thirty-feet, a floor in mosaic of the choicest woods, paintings by Robert and Vernet in place of tapestry and let into panels, mantelpieces of Carara marble, supported by cariatides which Beaumarchais had procured at an immense expense from Italy, and mahogany doors with looking-glass centres. In the cabinet of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was a *secrétaire,* worth not less than thirty

thousand francs; it was entirely in marqueterie, representing delightful landscapes.

The garden with its terraces, which had caused the removal of great quantities of soil, was designed and planted so as to disguise the limited space it occupied, and it appeared much larger than it was; a wide carriage drive ran quite through it to the end of the property; sloping downs, masonry work, masses of the rarest flowers, pretty constructions placed with art at different distances, a piece of water surrounded by shady trees, on which small boats moved about, and which was supplied by a cascade from a rock; everywhere contrivances more or less singular attracted the attention of the visitors. For example, in the middle of the garden rose a temple to Bacchus, with a little Greek colonnade; as this temple was intended for collations, it bore this inscription in macaronic Latin on the pediment:

"Erexi templum à Bacchus
Amicis que gourmandibus."

This temple was raised upon another rock, whose sombre and mysterious entrance hid a gastronomic laboratory. Not far from this was a Chinese bridge, with its obligato accompaniment of bells; at the side opened a cavern, which extended to the end of the garden, passing under the piece of water, a real tunnel of cut stone in which an ice-house had been intro-

duced, and which terminated in an arcade with a railing, which opened into the Rue Amelot. Above the arcade was this inscription:

"Ce petit jardin fut planté
L'an premier de la liberté."

In the groves, at each step were seen traces of the expansive disposition of Beaumarchais; in one place was a bust of his first patron, Pâris-Duverney, with these lines:

"Il m'instruisit par ses travaux;
Je lui dois le peu que je vaux."

Elsewhere was seen a little funeral monument, raised to the memory of the president Dupaty, with these words:

"Et nous aussi, nous le pleurons."

Further on was a statue to Love, ornamented with this paternal distich:

"O toi qui mets le trouble en plus d'une famille,
Je te demande, Amour, le bonheur de ma fille."

On the stand of two statues placed together, of Plato and the Dancing Slave, you read:

"L'homme en sa dignité se maintient libre, il pense;
L'esclave dégradé ne pense point, il danse."

Finally, under a lonely bower, Beaumarchais had

written a sort of adieu to the world, of which I will only extract the four following lines :

"Désabusé comme Candide .
Et plus tolérant que Martin,
Cet asyle est ma Propontide :
J'y cultive en paix mon jardin."

Such was the sumptuous and charming retreat that Beaumarchais was preparing for his old age. As he did not inhabit it until 1791, and as it was his destiny to attract the attention of the curious in everything he did, which he did not dislike, notwithstanding the bitterness by which it was sometimes accompanied, his house was for nearly two years a sort of public monument, that the Parisians of all classes, and the provincials who came to Paris, thought themselves bound to visit, so much so, that the proprietor had tickets of admission printed, which he gave to whoever asked for them politely. Often even, when the form of the request made it worth the trouble, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" added to the admission asked for a few lines of his prose, always pleasing, and varying according to the quality or sex of the person who applied.

At one time the Duke of Orleans announces to Beaumarchais his intention of visiting his garden, to whom the latter writes, "Hasten, Monseigneur; for my garden has already narrowly escaped being destroyed these ten times. I do not know what

there is in store for me." Another time Mirabeau, after the reconciliation, comes in company with Sieyès, and several other deputies, to partake of a collation in the temple of Bacchus. Sometimes a very pleasing young girl, Mademoiselle Rose Perrot, for example, asks to see his garden.

"Monsieur,—I am selected at this moment by all my family, to present a petition to you. A petition! you will say. Oh, do not alarm yourself; it is only a request to see your garden. They might have commissioned some one who would have asked this permission with more grace; but they have re-assured me, by telling me you are very indulgent; that you have too great a mind to allow yourself to criticise my letter, and that you can easily imagine yourself in the position of a young girl of sixteen, obliged to write to a person who possesses talent in the highest degree. I ask, then, your indulgence in reading this, your kindness in acquiescing to my request, and am for life your servant,

"Rose Perrot.

"65, Rue des Tournelles."

Beaumarchais was too gallant to be satisfied with coldly sending an admission to this young unknown, whose expression, "your servant *for life*," shows her to have been as ingenuous as her letter was pleasing.

"It would be impossible, Mademoiselle," he replied, "to ask the smallest favour in the world with more grace. Happy he whom you may judge worthy to receive from you more interesting ones. My little garden is far from meriting the favour of your visit, but such as it is embellish it with your presence; it will be dearer to me afterwards, and your com-

pany will be welcome. Only I think it rather imprudent not to reserve, for more important objects, the intervention of so intelligent a young person. Persons diminish their influence by using it for such trifles.'

"Receive with kindness the compliments and the respectful thanks of him who is honoured by being, Mademoiselle,

"Your, &c.,

BEAUMARCHAIS."

It was thus the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" sought to obtain forgiveness for his garden, by opening it to whoever wished to visit it. Vain precautions! He was soon to be launched into one of those social crises, where envy does not pardon the possession of riches, even when they are the result of labour. Like the Roman whom Sylla proscribed on account of his *Alban villa*, his beautiful house on the boulevard was to be for him but one reason more for his proscription, and an inexhaustible source of denunciations, persecutions, and torment. He was destined to inhabit it but a short time, to die there in the midst of the cares of a ruined fortune, and, as one of his friends has well said, "He was only to find rest in this asylum, during the few years his ashes reposed there." Now there is not even a trace of this house, this garden, those groves, those buildings, those inscriptions, arranged with so much care and love. All this was not to last even thirty years. It was useless to build and plant so much. The smallest piece of paper scrawled on by the author of "The Marriage

of Figaro" has been more durable than his monument.

From the 14th July, Beaumarchais had a presentiment of the new dangers which awaited him. He had seen with gladness the convocation of the States-general; he had hoped that thus, without too great a shock, the regeneration of France might be attained, by a constitution limiting the royal power, and the destruction of those abuses which he, for his part, had so warmly attacked. Gudin informs us, in his manuscript, that on this point Beaumarchais had greater illusions than himself, and frequently combated his mistrust. "Do not alarm," he said, "those minds that the firm hope of a great amelioration can sustain, in the astonishing career which is opening before us." Feeling himself under the weight of a violent unpopularity, caused by his recent quarrel with Bergasse, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" did not solicit the functions of deputy, and kept at a distance observing events. Soon the foolish resistance of the court, and a part of the privileged orders to the just wishes of the *tiers état*, led to the first popular *coup d'état*, which inaugurated in France the disastrous and immoral régime of *coups d'états* of all shades. Beaumarchais saw the fall of the Bastille from his yet unfinished house.* In the trou-

* Some months before, he had seen, with a personal uneasiness which may be imagined, a house near his own, that of Réveillon, the

bles of that day and the following one, he figured as president of the district des Blancs-Manteaux, occupied in maintaining order in his quarter, and preserving some disarmed soldiers from the fury of the people—a constant and uniform incident in revolutions. Here is the letter he writes to a captain of the regiment of Salis-Allemand, on sending him back one of his soldiers, a note in which is painted both the agitation of the moment, and the true political sentiments of Beaumarchais, at least at that epoch.

"Wednesday, July 15, 1789.

"In returning to my house, Sir, I add to the good I have been happy enough to accomplish, that of preventing your soldier from setting out in broad day; he would be torn to pieces. I have had a great coat and a hat, belonging to one of my people, given to him, which you will return to me. I have made him also take off his gaiters, that nothing may cause his recognition.

"A grenadier of the French guards, full of humanity, promises me to protect him to the barrier.

"God save the King, and restore him to his people, who, in the midst of their fury, have not lost a religious respect for this sacred name. Everything else is broken up.

"I salute you, Monsieur,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS

"President of the District des Blancs-Manteaux, at the present time."

During the following days, Beaumarchais was com-

manufacturer, sacked and burnt in broad day. There will be found, in the Appendix, No. 24, a letter which he wrote on this subject to M. de Crosne, lieutenant of police.

missioned, at his own request, by the mayor of Paris, to superintend the demolition of the Bastille, that it might be effected without obstructing the great sewer close to it, or damaging the neighbouring houses. A short time afterwards, he was named by the electors of his district member of the municipal body, which was then called the representation of the commune; but denunciations already showered upon him. All his adversaries in his different law-suits, especially in the last, and all whom his riches irritated, denounced him to the fury of the mob, as uttering "uncivic" sentiments, or as storing up corn or arms. His house, placed at the very entrance of that terrible faubourg, the head-quarters of insurrection, appeared a sort of insolent invitation, which naturally called for the visits of the people. In avoiding these dangerous visits, Beaumarchais passed his life: at one time asking for official visits either from the districts or from the municipality, and placarding all over the quarter the result of these visits, stating uniformly that nothing suspicious had been found in his house; at another time distributing around him as much money as possible, for disorder and misery walk together, and in proposing to the municipality all kinds of charitable institutions. In truth, he did all this good rather openly; his left hand was not entirely ignorant of what his right hand was doing; but who can bring that as a crime against him when he had only this

means of protecting himself against the most unjust and formidable unpopularity? All his troubles, all his personal dangers, did not prevent him from following, with great attention, the progress of public affairs, nor from speaking his mind, every time the opportunity presented itself, with a frankness which was not without courage.

To appreciate the merit of the letter we are going to cite, we must recall the terrible effect which was then produced by a tragedy which now no one reads, but which at the commencement of the revolution was a great event. I speak of the tragedy of "Charles IX.," the first work of the impetuous youth of Marie-Joseph Chénier. One can read in the "Memoirs of Ferrières" the exciting description of the almost wild enthusiasm with which each evening a pit, already inflamed by events, received these pompous and hollow but sinister verses, sounding the tocsin against kings, priests, and nobles, and keeping up in the breasts of the masses, the fires of anger and vengeance. Not only was it dangerous to hiss "Charles IX.," but it was imprudent not to admire it; so true is this, that even Mirabeau, who, we recollect, cut up three years before with so much eloquence the railleries of Beaumarchais against the "orders of the state," thought that, for the interest of his popularity, he ought to manifest publicly his admiration for a tragedy which was revolutionary in a very different manner from

"The Marriage of Figaro." It was under these circumstances that Beaumarchais wrote to the *semainier* of the Théâtre-Français the following letter :—

"In thanking you, my dear Florence, for the place you kept for me yesterday at the Français, I wish to repay you and the Theatre, by giving some useful advice to the company.

"The piece of 'Charles IX.' certainly has merit; in some scenes it has a terrible and rending effect, although it languishes in others, and has very little action. It has been placed on the stage with the greatest care, and there are only praises to be bestowed on all the actors who perform in it. The striking contrast between the characters of the cardinal and the chancellor, often animates a picture which the other characters weaken; but in seeking for the morality of the piece I find it more than doubtful. In this time of unbridled licence, the people want much less to be excited than restrained; these barbarous excesses, to whatever party we attribute them, seem to me dangerous to present to the people, and calculated to justify them in their own eyes. The more success 'Charles IX.' has, the more force my observation will acquire, for the piece will have been seen by persons of all degrees. And then, what a time will that be, my friends, when the King and his family have come to Paris to reside,* making allusion to plots which may have brought them there! What a time for fixing on the clergy, in the person of a cardinal a crime he did not commit (that of blessing the daggers of the assassinators of the protestants)! what a time, I repeat, is that, when, stripped of all their wealth, the clergy ought not to be a prey to public malevolence, since they save the State through its making use of their riches! If the plans that are attributed to some schemes

* This refers to the return of the King to Paris after the days of the 5th and 6th of October.

at the court had had their full success, if the clergy had succeeded in retaining their possessions, I could conceive in what spirit such a work was permitted; but in the state in which things are, I own that I cannot conceive it. I do not mean to blame the author in this; his work was done; he had a right to wish it to be played. His motives were without doubt pure, but ought not the administration to select the time when such a play should be played, or withdrawn?

"As for you, ladies and gentlemen, if you do not wish it to be said that everything is indifferent to you, provided you get your receipts; if you would rather be thought citizens as much or more than you are comedians; indeed, if you would wish your profits to increase without offending any one, without wounding any order or rank; reflect upon the counsel that my friendship offers you, and consider it under its different aspects. The piece of 'Charles IX.' has given me pain, without any consolation, which will make many wise and moderate men dislike it, and those of ardent disposition, Gentlemen, do not want such models. How recreative after the scene of an innocent baker hanged, beheaded, dragged by the people through the streets, not eight days ago, and which may be repeated, to show us Coligny on the stage, massacred, beheaded, dragged about by order of the Court!

"We need rather to be solaced by the representation of the virtues of our ancestors than frightened by those of our own vices and crimes.*

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

* This unpublished letter had been communicated by me in part to a journal; it was also reproduced in part again by M. Sainte-Beuve, in his "Etude sur Beaumarchais;" in inserting it here entire, I think I ought to bring forward a fragment, at least, of that of Mirabeau's, of which I just spoke, and which is very little known. These changes in the attitudes of men are always instructive. The

Though hostile to these furious evocations of our old civil wars, Beaumarchais, the son of a protestant converted to catholicism, was always animated by an ardent zeal for religious liberty, and especially for the legal enfranchisement of the protestants. Thus,

following was the occasion upon which the former enemy of "The Marriage of Figaro" interposed in favour of "Charles IX." After forty representations, the majority of the actors acknowledging the dangerous influence of the piece had left off playing it, and refused to reproduce it. Young Talma, who had just made his appearance, who had given much effect to the neglected part of "Charles IX.," and who, besides, was known a little at this time as a fiery democrat, insisted on the revival, and wished to force his fellow actors by the support of the public and of Mirabeau, who had demanded the revival in the name of the federates of the provinces. To assist Talma, Mirabeau wrote the following letter, authorising him to publish it:—"Yes, certainly, sir, you may say it was I who asked for 'Charles IX.' in the name of the federates of the provinces, and even that I did so with much persistence. You can say it, because it is the truth; and a truth I am proud of. The sort of repugnance that the comedians have shown about it, at least if we may believe the reports, is so disobliging towards the public, it is even founded on motives so foreign to their natural welfare, they are so little called upon to decide if a work lawfully represented is or is not *incendiary*, they had so warmly assured me they would only yield to a wish of the public, that I have had to make their answer known." This letter, which finished with some other lines still more disdainful towards the actors, produced amongst the latter a violent explosion against Talma, who published it; it was decided by a great majority that he should be exiled from the society, but the public took part with the young tragedian, the municipality also decided for him, and, after some very stormy scenes, young Talma re-appeared in "Charles IX." [On this subject consult "L'Histoire du Théâtre-Français depuis la Révolution," par Etienne et Martainville, vol. i., page 143, &c.]

when the constitutional convention had restored the position of Frenchmen to the descendants of all Frenchmen expatriated on account of their religion, Beaumarchais, enthusiastic at the speech of Barère on the subject, wrote him the following letter:—

"Paris, September 11, 1780.

"I cannot refuse myself, Sir, the pleasure of thanking you for the pleasure I have myself received from your fine speech on the restitution of the property of the protestants who have fled the kingdom. I have my heart full, and my eyes moist from it. Happy the nation which can pride itself before all the world, on an act so just and magnanimous! Happy the orator who, charged with the noble office of putting such a subject in a clear light, has found in his heart the touching words with which you have ornamented your logic!

"Whatever injury the revolution may cause me, I shall bless it for the great good it has effected now, and I shall love you all my life,* even without knowing you, for the deep feeling you have shown in this important matter. For twelve years I have not ceased to work to solicit ministers to soften the fate of the unfortunate protestants; for ever blessed be the assembly which has recalled the fugitives to the rank of French citizens!

"I have the honour to be, &c.,

"Beaumarchais."

Here is another proof of Beaumarchais' solicitude for religious liberty. This one appears to me striking. We are not accustomed to picture to ourselves the

* It is probable that four years later the pleader Barère, who perorated so gracefully and so unworthily in favour of the guillotine, appeared less loveable to Beaumarchais.

author of "The Marriage of Figaro" petitioning very earnestly to obtain for the Roman Catholics of his neighbourhood a greater number of masses, and above all, in June 1794, an epoch when such pre-occupations were not precisely the order of the day. His letter is addressed to the municipal officers:—

"Gentlemen,—The citizens of the Vielle-Rue-du-Temple, and several other neighbouring streets, unite in remarking to you that the distance to the Church of Saint Gervais and Saint Protais, that of their parish, and the few masses which are said there, force those to miss them very often who keep house while the others are fulfilling one of the greatest Christian duties. Women, young girls, all pious and sensible persons to whom religious forms are a sweet, serviceable, and even necessary support, in accord with their worthy curate, unite with all our citizens in begging you to order the interior chapel of the hospitalières of Saint Gervais to be thrown open to them at the hour of prayer, as you have favoured the citizens of the Rues Saint-Denis and des Lombards, by opening to them the hospitalières of St. Catherine. Our worthy curate proposes, gentlemen, even to increase the number of masses necessary for this large quarter, having one celebrated in the church of Blancs-Manteaux.

"And I, whom they have commissioned to draw up this request, although the least religious of all, I, who feel that this favour has become indispensable, as much for the regular fulfilment of duties, as for putting a stop to the unworthy assertions of the enemies of the country who spread everywhere the idea that the civic spirit is hostile to religion, I join with my wife, my daughter, my sisters, my fellow citizens, and all their families, to obtain from you that so many good Christians who ask for masses may have them at least as often as they require. We shall receive this justice as a

marked favour, which will honour your catholicism as much as this petition honours theirs and mine.

"CARON BEAUMARCHAIS.

"The Marais, June 28, 1791."

This letter clashes somewhat with the ceremony of the marriage of the *priests of Brahma* at the end of "Tarare," but these contrasts are common enough in human nature; they are particularly so in Beaumarchais and the time he lived in. It was no longer the philosopher or the dramatic poet, it was the husband, the brother, and, above all, the father who spoke. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" adored his only daughter; she had just left her convent, and if he did not often go to mass himself he was not sorry she did so for him. This good fatherly disposition of his, so simple, so affectionate, so cheerful, and which makes us love him, is especially seen in an old French round, in which he celebrates the return of his daughter Eugénie to the paternal roof. This round has already been noticed as a charming composition by an excellent judge.* It is, perhaps, indeed the happiest of Beaumarchais' poetic inspirations. The artless turn of the old popular songs appears in it with a mixture of graceful amenity, wit, and gaiety. To make that evident, it would perhaps be necessary to reproduce all the couplets in succession; but, as there are eighteen of them, and

* M. Saint-Marc Girardin, in his "Notice sur Beaumarchais."

Gudin has already published fifteen, we will only give a few. We will however restore the title of this round in its integrity, which Gudin, I know not why, has mutilated. It stands thus :—

Old Gallic civic round, sung on the return of Eugénie Beaumarchais from her convent to the paternal roof, dedicated to her mother, and strung together by her father, the first poet of Paris—as you come in by the Porte Saint-Antoine.

To the Air:

'Oh! oh! s' fit-il, c'est la raison
Que je sois maître en ma maison.'

Hier, Augustin Pierre,
Parcourant son jardin,
Regardant sa chaumière,
Disait d'un air chagrin:
Je le veux, car c'est la raison
Que je sois maître en ma maison.

Quelle sotte manie,
Du bonheur me privant,
Retient mon Eugénie
Dans un fatal couvent!
Je veux l'avoir: c'est la raison
Que j'en sois maître en ma maison.

Elle use sa jeunesse
A chanter du latin,
Tandis que la vieillesse
Me pousse vers ma fin.
Tant que je vis, c'est la raison
Que je l'embrasse en ma maison.

This round, which was first circulated as a printed *brochure*, led to rather amusing consequences. Some

of the couplets brought forward the question of the marriage of Madlle. Eugénie, who was then fourteen years old, amongst others the following:—

Tous ces *beaux* que l'on nomme
Te lorgnent-ils déjà?
Dis-leur: Mon gentilhomme,
N'êtes vous que cela?
Des parchemins et du blason
N'ouvriront point cette maison.

Si quelque autre plus tendre
Te fait contes en l'air,
Laisse-moi les entendre,
Car ton père y voit clair.
Je te dirai si c'est raison
Qu'il soit reçu dans ma maison.

Tel excellent jeune homme
Voit le ciel dans tes yeux,
Dis-lui: Bel astronome,
Parlez à ce bon vieux:
Il est mon père, et c'est raison
Qu'il ait un gendre à sa façon.

S'il a pour la tribune
Quelque talent d'éclat,
Qu'importe sa fortune?
Juge, écrivain, soldat,
Esprit, vertu, douce raison,
Voilà son titre en ma maison.

These couplets being spread abroad, spread at the same time the idea, that the only daughter of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," a charming per-

son and a rich heiress, was marriageable, and that her father was only desirous of choosing a husband by the merit of the competitors. Now, as the number of persons who possess nothing but merit is always very great, Beaumarchais had offers of marriage submitted to him in 1791, of a most singular description. At one time a gentleman who does not value his coat of arms, who despises the fortune he no longer possesses, and who esteems virtue only, desires to marry Mademoiselle Eugénie and her portion; elsewhere, a father quite unknown to Beaumarchais, begs him to keep his daughter for his son, who is still at school; then, again, comes a captain who has but his sword, but it is worth the bâton of a marshal of France. To scatter politely this crowd of virtuous and disinterested would-be husbands, the father of Mademoiselle Eugénie wrote a letter, which served him for nearly all of them, excepting some slight modifications; here is a copy of it, addressed to a poor, but good and brave, officer.

"Paris, May 21, 1791.

"Although your letter, Sir, appears to have its origin in a piece of pleasantry, as it is written with earnest civility, I owe it an answer. You have been deceived respecting my daughter; scarcely fourteen, she is yet far from the time when I shall leave her mistress to choose herself a master. Perhaps, you are ignorant of the circumstances which have led to your proposal. I have very lately taken my daughter from her convent, my joy at her return having extracted a round from my idleness, after having been

sung at my table, it has been circulated everywhere. The jovial, Gallic, civic tone introduced into it, joined to the jesting about the future establishment of my daughter, has made many persons fancy I already thought of such a thing; but, may Minerva preserve me from engaging her, before the age when her heart will be given, with a knowledge of what it imports! The convent has completed her physical education, it is for me to complete her moral education, before giving her up to her own feelings, in so serious a case as one that will bind her for life. This, Sir, is not the business of a few months, but of years.

"What my round has said in joke will be certainly my rule for enlightening her young heart. Fortune will have less effect on me, than talents and virtue; for my wish is that she may be happy. A long line of ancestors is ceasing to have any signification; no living being exists without ancestors, and as for those who were noble, henceforth they will not influence the fate of their descendants; each will be what he is worth; thus the law, the constitution, and reason, will have it to be. Ah! reason above all, so much insulted by our Gothic institutions.

"I send you, Monsieur, my rather jocular round, and if you sing it, you will sometimes say, 'The good old man loved his daughter dearly, and was not in his dotage.' Receive my thanks, for all the obliging things by which you have deigned to honour me, and the sincere wishes of the husbandman, "BEAUMARCHAIS."

We have just seen in this letter that Beaumarchais thought very little of titles of nobility, however, when the constitutional assembly abolished them, and decreed that each individual should be reduced to his primitive name, or should suppress his particle, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro"

speaks of this decree with a raillery, through which peeps a little ill humour. After that, although his titles, for which he had *the receipt*, were of a more modern date than those of Mirabeau, he could, without much presumption, imitate the speech of the celebrated orator to the journalists, who in obedience to the decree named him Riquetti: "With your Riquetti, you have confused Europe during three days." It was certainly necessary for the public to have some days to accustom themselves to recognise Beaumarchais in Caron. It was to his wife, who was then at the waters of Saint-Amand, that the ex-secretary of the King transmitted his impressions upon the decree of the Constituent Assembly, in a letter of the 22nd June, 1790, from which I extract the following passages :—

"What is to become of us, my dear; now, we are to lose all our dignities? Reduced to our family names, without armorial bearings and without liveries! Just heaven! What ruin! I dined the day before yesterday with Madame de la Reynière, and we called her, to her face, Mad. Grimod, short, and without a handle. Mgr. the Bishop of Rodez, and Mgr. the Bishop of Agen, were addressed as Monsieur, each was called by his name; it was like leaving a ball at the opera in winter, when everybody is unmasked.

"I wrote this morning to Madame la Comtesse de Choiseul-Gouffier, I said: 'Until July 14, I will give you, Madame, from respect to your rights, the title of countess; but afterwards you will have to thank me for it, if you please, it will be pure courtesy. . . . .'

"I send you, in the original, an invitation to a female club that I received for you yesterday. I replied that you were at the waters, but that you joined in their intentions, that at least I presumed so, and I have addressed my answer to Madame la Secrétaire. I think the 14th will be the finest thing ever seen.* But Louis XIV., on the 14th, will be stripped like the rest of the great. No more slaves at his feet in the Place des Victoires. Ah! but what destruction. To leave the good Henri IV. his four chained statues, we assert they are four vices; they dispute it with us, but we do not give up the point. . . . .

"I showed on Sunday that I had no more possessions which bore the name of Beaumarchais, and that the decree clearly stated that persons should no longer retain their *noms de terre;* but that nothing ought to be taken from the *noms de guerre,* and it was always under that name I had vanquished my cowardly enemies. . . . ."

By the side of this friendly letter, in which the author seems to be speaking with a smile on his lips of the 14th July, and of all the excitements of the time, I find one in a solemn tone, addressed to the President of the National Guard, which is nothing less than a proposition to raise on the Champ-de-Mars a monument on a gigantic plan.

"In the midst of this immense circle," he writes, "upon a square piece of ground 210 feet in extent, I raise a triumphal column to Truth 148 feet high, to the base of which you arrive by a flight of forty steps 120 feet long, on each side of the square, &c. All the remainder is in the same proportion; I remark

* He alludes to the 14th July, the day of the Federation.

in it, amongst other pleasing things, four guard-houses, which, united by subterranean galleries, might serve during the fêtes as a reserve for the national guards, and contain seven or eight thousand men." This civic embellishment seems to me to indicate that the spirit of order and conservation never forsook Beaumarchais.

Sometimes the political anxieties of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" were expressed with a fervour, through which was seen a noble and sincere sentiment; thus, in the last days of the constituent assembly, at the very time when this assembly was destroying itself by its imprudence, and consuming its last days in the midst of miserable conflicts, Beaumarchais, writing on the 10th September, 1791, to one of the most honourable members of the majority, Beaumetz, with whom he was connected, exclaims: "Who could have believed that the end of so great a work would be dishonoured by such vile debates, and that we should give to our enemies, without and within, the triumph of seeing our constitution almost crumble away at the time when we ought to be giving it a solid standing? Miserable interest, and still more miserable ambition, which renders our legislators the laughing-stock of those who took a pleasure in respecting them. And M. de Bouillé, M. de Calonne, and M. d'Autichamp, raise the spirits of their party, by showing them what strength our divisions give them. Whilst you are

leaving all our affairs in disorder, is it the legislature of lawyers, which we are forming by these cabals, that will re-establish them?"

The future did not always appear to Beaumarchais under so sombre an aspect, to judge by the more cheerful picture that he addressed to a Russian prince at St. Petersburg, November 12, 1791. Perhaps national pride induced him to represent things as a little better than he thought them.

"The revolution," he wrote, "has had a great influence upon literature. Free nations generally lose in grace what they acquire in strength, and our theatre is affected by the new spirit in France. All occupied by great interests, and become half republican, we can no longer mould ourselves to the effeminate literature suitable to the *ancien régime;* but it must be confessed that, in trying to straighten our tree, we have made it bend in the opposite direction.

"Hard words, which drive away the Muses, are in our actors' mouths. We have strong castles instead of palaces, and cannons for an orchestra. The *rue* takes the place of the *ruelle;* where we once heard sighs, we now hear the cry of liberty;—and live free or die, in place of, I adore you. These are our plays and amusements. It is Athens the pleasing, a little changed into Sparta the stern; but the pleasing being our element, the return of peace will restore our character only with more vigour added to it; our gaiety will regain the upper hand."

Whilst thus giving himself up to the observation and appreciation of public affairs, Beaumarchais continued his epistolary intercourse with the insulters, the beggars, the schemers, who besieged him, as in

times past, but not without some fresh shades of characteristic of the license of the times.

We will give one slight specimen of the degree of effrontery which a rogue can use in exercising his calling; it is one amongst many of the same kind that Beaumarchais received in 1790.

"Sir,—I have just bought a manuscript, which is entitled 'Confessions of M. de Beaumarchais.' This pamphlet may contain about five sheets in octavo. I am ready to have it printed, but I should be sorry to make the pamphlet public, as it would bring you a great many enemies. I purchased it for six louis, several persons have offered me a profit of six louis on it, and if I allow it to be printed, I cannot say of what advantage it may be to me. Therefore, Sir, consider if you would like to arrange with me. Make me any offer you may like, and depend upon my zeal and discretion.

"As I am bargaining for the printing, I beg you to give me an answer by Tuesday evening. Address the letter to M. Bunel, *chez* Mademoiselle Bondidier, marchande lingère, rue Comtesse d'Artois."

Here is Beaumarchais' short but expressive answer:—

"I would not give six liards to prevent a libel upon myself seeing the day; but I would willingly give six louis to him who would bring me the ears of the scoundrel who has written it, and six more for those of the wretch who is going to print it. And as every work merits its reward, I am going to give up Sieur Bunel's letter, that he may receive his from the national justice, when his libel appears.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

Then comes a very clever man, M. Simonnet, who

has devoted himself to wonderful calculations upon the chances in lotteries, and who pursues Beaumarchais with marvellous plans, for which he requires funds. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" very benevolently takes the trouble to set his mind right, or at all events to show him he is not his dupe.

"I have passed my life, Sir," he writes to him, "in gaining from the lottery all the money I have not put into it, and I congratulate myself upon it every day. In giving a critical and strict glance at these frightful establishments of lotteries, hot beds of all the evils of the people, which only serve to fill the hospitals and prisons, I find that the lottery which is so improperly named *royal*, and which ought to be named *infernal*, is carried on, so that the least fatal manner of staking is certainly on the *extraits;* but even then, if you placed at each drawing twenty sous on each number, you would have expended ninety livres. You would always gain the five *extraits*, or five times fifteen for yourself, that is to say, seventy-five francs, from which it results that the smallest loss that could be sustained at this infamous game is fifteen out of ninety under the most favourable hypothesis. I should pity you, Sir, for having a mania for this game if you had funds to risk in it, but as you only solicit them elsewhere, the only danger that you run is the grief of having drawn into your ruinous speculations those who might commit the folly of yielding to them. I salute you frankly.

"Caron Beaumarchais."

The ordinary begging-letter writers have not the same characteristics they had before the Revolution. Repulsed, they return to the charge, write insulting and threatening letters; and Beaumarchais, who had

already so many enemies on his shoulders that he did not wish to increase the number, whilst he gave to some, passed a part of his life in proving as eloquently as possible that he could not give to others. A letter, in which he disputes in his best style with one of his imperious borrowers, will give us a clear insight into his situation on the 1st May, 1792:—

"Since you have done me the honour," he writes, "to suppose I have a little philosophy and sensibility, of which *I make a parade* in my writings, I am going to do you that of lending you a little more justice than you show in yours; and I will ask you, How can a man of such sense not feel that the more a man has constrained himself to be generous and feeling, the less means he must have left for satisfying all the unfortunate, who, looking upon him as a mark, throw their bowls and quoits at him? The crowd of petitioners who apply to me is such, that I should require ten secretaries to answer them, for a word is far from sufficient for the unhappy: they must have consolation, details, and above all, assistance. Not being able to fulfil this melancholy office to all who write to me, I groan, I stop, and the only result is I have but two correspondents in the world: strangers, who beg of me; and unjust men, who insult me, furious men, who threaten me, without ever having seen me. Are you satisfied, Sir, with having made me lose my time, in telling you useless things, when I have so many useful ones to do? Have for me, Sir, the gentle compassion you request for yourself, and you will cease to insult one who has never done you any evil, or wrong to any one, except not being able to oblige everybody at the same time.* I salute you.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

* Beaumarchais' papers supply proofs of his benevolence to

In the midst of preoccupations, and of the various disquietudes of which we have just sketched a picture, Beaumarchais found time to give himself up to the two passions which occupied so much of his life —the theatre, and stage speculation. He wrote his drama of "La Mère Coupable," and engaged to supply the French government with sixteen thousand guns.

Let us speak of the drama before the affair of the guns, which forms also a kind of drama, in which the hero will be seen fearfully victimised.

Finished in January, 1791, "La Mère Coupable" was read in February, and accepted at the Theâtre Français; but at this time there was going on between

such an extent that to produce them would be endless. We will only cite a little delicate note addressed by him to the superior of the Convent de Bon Secours, where his daughter was placed, dated July 27th, 1790. The prioress had recommended to him a poor young person who could no longer pay for her schooling: "I send you, Madame," he wrote, "a note for 200 livres for your unfortunate scholar. Now her year is paid for. I shall have the honour to give to you, or her, the first time I go to the convent, three louis in money, which will be six francs a month, the same that I give my daughter; but I entreat you, Madame, that this assistance may not be used to force or urge her vocation. I should be deeply grieved if she were to be in the least constrained as to the future. I have not the honour of knowing her; the good you told me of her was what determined me: let her be free and less unhappy; these are the only thanks I ask; keep my secret, I am surrounded by violent enemies." Here we cannot accuse Beaumarchais of publishing his beneficence; he seeks, on the contrary, to hide it. To the rough copy of his letter is attached a letter of thanks, full of feeling, addressed to him by the young lady.

the authors and actors, with increased animosity, that eternal law-suit of which we have already spoken, and which the legislature, like the constituent assembly, decided in favour of the authors. Beaumarchais, entrusted by the latter to defend their interests, did so with a sincerity that caused a rupture between the Theâtre Français and himself. A new company which, with his support, had just opened a theatre in his neighbourhood, in the Marais, solicited his piece, and it was represented for the first time at this theatre the 6th June, 1792. Weakly played at first, it had but little success; afterwards revived by the French comedians, in May, 1797, it completely succeeded; and even now, when it is represented by skilful actors, it produces a lively impression on the public.

The style of "La Mère Coupable" is often weak, incorrect, and tedious; it is far from being equal to "The Barber of Seville," or "The Marriage of Figaro;" but the subject of the piece alone is very dramatic, and of unquestionable morality. In the faithless wife, to show above all the guilty mother; to depict a woman endowed with estimable feelings, who, through one single day of weakness, vainly redeemed by years of virtue and repentance, sees her whole existence destroyed, her repose for ever disturbed, and not only her own, but that of all who surround her; to introduce upon the stage a young man of

twenty, whose suspicious birth is the torment of his mother, the torment of the husband, who is not his father, and his own torment; to show all the charm of domestic life poisoned by constraint, suspicion, mistrust, and hate, until the terrible moment in which the fatal secret which has weighed twenty years upon the family is unveiled; to show us a woman, in other respects estimable, crushed under the weight of shame, prostrated, with blushes on her forehead, before her husband, and reduced even to dreading the contempt of her son; this certainly is a conception which does not want elevation or interest.

La Harpe, who, as I think, shows too much contempt for this drama, is obliged to acknowledge that the idea is good; but not satisfied with insisting on the weak points of the piece, especially on the love of Florestine and Léon, a love which displeases and offends, although it is incestuous only in appearance, and the public know what will be the end of it —not content with criticising the exaggerated character of Begearss, of pointing out the improbabilities and frequent inaccuracies, La Harpe shows no favour to any part of it: all is absolutely bad: "It is," he says, "a *downright silly production*;" he goes so far as to apply the word *foolish* to one of the most beautiful and pathetic scenes in the fourth act, where the Countess, overwhelmed by the discovery of her fault, answers the terrible interrogations of the Count

by fragments of prayers, which she addresses, not to her husband, but to God. La Harpe assures us that at the first representation of this scene everybody laughed, it being, in his opinion, insupportable on the stage, "where," he says, "women do not pray for a quarter of an hour when they have to answer their husband." "Nothing shows more clearly," he lightly adds, "what blunders a man of wit is capable of in things which are foreign to his class of talent." It appears to us that the word *blunder* might advantageously be paid back to La Harpe. It is very doubtful whether everybody laughed at this scene in 1792; but it is very certain that no one laughs at it now. People think rightly, that there is something true and pathetic in showing a modest, feeling, pious woman, overwhelmed by an unexpected revelation which degrades her in the eyes of her husband, not finding words to answer him, and not knowing what to do but to accuse herself before God—not for a quarter of an hour, as La Harpe very falsely says, but for an instant—in broken phrases, very skilfully intermixed with some phrases from the Count, who reads with fury the accusing letter. This scene in its *ensemble* is certainly the most beautiful of the piece; it never fails to have a deep effect on the spectators, and it is to it alone, probably, that the drama of "La Mère Coupable" owes its position on the stage in our time.

Amongst the numerous letters written or received by Beaumarchais, on the subject of this drama, we will reproduce two only. The one is addressed by him to the widow of the last of the Stuarts, to the friend of Alfieri, the Countess of Albany, who was in Paris in 1791, and who had asked Beaumarchais to give at her house a reading of "La Mère Coupable." The note in which he answers her gives, I think, a lively sort of *résumé* of the qualities and defects of his style.

"Paris, February 5, 1791.

"Madame la Comtesse,—Since you absolutely wish to hear my very severe work, I cannot object to it; but attend to one observation: when I wish for laughter, I must have shouts; when I wish for crying, I must have sobs; I know nothing between but wearisomeness.

"Admit, then, whom you will to the reading of Tuesday, but keep away those worn-out hearts, those withered minds, who look with contempt upon those emotions that we find so delicious. Those persons are only fit to speak of revolutions. Have some feeling women, men to whom the heart is not a chimera, and then we can have a full flow of tears. I promise you this melancholy pleasure, and am, with respect, Madame la Comtesse,

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

The second note is from Grétry, then an old man, who appears to have a desire to set "La Mère Coupable" to music.

"I dream only of 'La Mère Coupable,'" he writes to Beaumarchais. "I have remarked that music is never so

well introduced, or has so good an effect, as when it occurs rarely. Will you let me choose twelve places in which you can versify your prose? That will be enough. I will answer for it, people will one day speak of the anger of Almaviva as they now speak of the anger of Achilles. If you give the piece to the Italian Company, it may have fifty successive representations; if you add to it twelve or fifteen pieces of music in different styles—it ought to have a hundred—and I shall have composed music upon a masterpiece worthy of old Grétry."

This idea of Grétry's was not carried out, but two years afterwards, under the Republic, "The Marriage of Figaro" transformed into a comic opera, and versified rather awkwardly by Beaumarchais, was played. I do not know who was the author of the music.*

* See, on this subject, Appendix, No. 25, an unpublished letter by Beaumarchais, in 1793, to the actors of the opera, who had just played the "Marriage of Figaro" as a *comic opera.*

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BEAUMARCHAIS AFTER THE 10TH AUGUST.—HIS 60,000 GUNS.—HIS LAW-SUIT.—THE CONVENTION.

At the same time that Beaumarchais gave his last piece to the theatre, he embarked in a new patriotic and commercial work, which was to ruin his fortune, and be the torment of his latter days.

France wanted arms in 1792: he undertook to procure them. One can scarcely understand how a man sixty years of age, rich, worn out by a most stormy life, afflicted by continually increasing deafness, surrounded by enemies, and only wishing for repose, could be induced to encumber himself with the task of bringing into France 60,000 guns, which were detained in Holland under circumstances that rendered the work as dangerous as it was difficult.

In reflecting on Beaumarchais' decided taste for dangerous speculations, provided they presented a certain character of public interest, we must, I think, in looking for the cause of this rash enterprise, seek it in his unpopularity at the time. "I told him," Gudin says in his manuscript on this subject, "that

a wise man in revolutionary times did not trade in arms or corn; but my prudence was false; in these times of disorder and uncertainty, they would have made it a crime on his part to have refused to procure the arms they had requested of him. His refusal would have been considered disaffection; he had but a choice of dangers; he exposed himself to the peril of being useful to his country."

At the commencement of 1792, a Belgian came and offered him 60,000 guns, obtained from disarming the Low Countries, deposited in Holland, and sold by Austria, who, foreseeing a war with France, had stipulated that the purchaser should send them to the colonies. Beaumarchais transmitted the proposition to the minister of war, de Grave, who employed him to bring the guns into France secretly, promising to pay a suitable price, and to advance him 500,000 francs in *assignats*, worth then about *three hundred thousand francs*; but the minister obliged him to deposit securities to the amount of 745,000 francs guaranteed by the city of Paris.

Beaumarchais obtained the promise, that if he wanted more money for the transport of the arms, they would remit him in part of the surplus 445,000 francs left as a deposit with the minister. The government also promised to use all its power to overcome the resistance of the Dutch government, which, fearing to embroil itself with Austria, detained

them at Tervère, a port of Zealand. War soon broke out between Austria and Prussia; Beaumarchais was not less ardent in asking for assistance in overcoming the resistance of Holland, with which they were still at peace: but, during the last year of the monarchy of Louis XVI., ministers succeeded each other with the rapidity of lightning. It was in vain that Beaumarchais assailed them. "I have *tired out*," he said, "in a few months, fourteen or fifteen of them:" he could not obtain their support in Holland, nor the money promised from the overplus of his deposit to transport these unfortunate guns, and whilst he exhausted himself in efforts, his enemies spread the report among the people that the guns were at his house, that he had them in cellars, and kept them to massacre the patriots. Nothing more was necessary to make them massacre him. The ex-capuchin Chabot, a member of the Legislative Assembly, denounced him to the tribune as concealing arms in a very suspicious place. Beaumarchais, always true to his character, told Chabot that he, Chabot, would be twenty times more to be suspected than the place, if he did not point it out. The following day, August 10th, the people went in crowds to his beautiful house on the boulevard, and searched it from top to bottom, without, however, taking away a pin. In the midst of this frightful scene, which the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" describes at length in

a letter already published, addressed to his daughter, whom he had just sent with her mother to Havre, he is seen preserving sufficient coolness to study the unruly people, and to "admire," he says, "that mixture of wildness and natural justice which appears through all the disorder." Some days afterwards, although he had taken care to publish everywhere, according to his custom, that the people had found nothing suspicious at his house, he was arrested, and conducted to the Abbaye, the 23rd of August. He was there on the 30th—that is to say, two days before the massacre of September—when it suddenly came into the head of the procurator of the commune, Manuel, to remember that he had had some quarrels with Beaumarchais, in which the latter had wittily ridiculed him; and he thought it would be a noble revenge to take him out of prison. Let us add, to be exact, that it was a woman to whom Beaumarchais had rendered a service, and who had some influence over Manuel, that decided him to this act of generosity. However, on the 30th, Manuel told his old adversary that he was free. Beaumarchais did not wait to be told this twice; he left, and the next morning but one the massacre began.

It would seem natural enough, at such a moment, that the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" should put his guns aside, to occupy himself especially with the preservation of his person; but, in becoming deaf,

he had acquired some of the obstinacy which is said to accompany that infirmity. He consented to hide himself, but only during the day, a few miles from Paris. Each night he returned on foot, across ploughed fields to avoid unpleasant meetings, and went to claim of the ministers the fulfilment of their predecessors' engagements, and to assist him in obtaining from Holland the 60,000 guns he had promised the nation. It must also be said, to explain his pertinacity, that it being known that he was the agent in this affair placed him in a state of continued suspicion with the people, until he had succeeded; and also, that he thought he saw that the minister Lebrun was going to work the affair secretly, for his own profit, leaving to him, in case of necessity, all the responsibility of a failure. This was what rendered him so tenacious that he fatigued and wore out even Danton, who could not avoid laughing to see a man who was so compromised, and who ought to think of nothing but his safety, persevere the day after the massacre of September, in coming every evening to ask for what they still owed on his deposit, and a mission to Holland.

At length, after the deliberation of a commission of the Legislative Assembly, called the *Commission of Arms*, which declared Beaumarchais had deserved well of the nation, and insisted of the executive power that he should be put in a position to finish

the enterprise, the minister Lebrun gave him a passport for Holland, promising to remit to him at the Hague the necessary money to raise the embargo the Dutch Government had laid on the guns. The minister also declared to him, that the French ambassador at the Hague would be directed to give his assistance to his operations. Upon the faith of this promise of the minister, Beaumarchais set out for Holland, and in passing through London he borrowed, at all hazards, a large sum of an English merchant, his correspondent and friend. Arrived at the Hague, he found the French minister without instructions respecting him, and without money: besides which, he found himself crossed in all his transactions, by the secret agents of the minister Lebrun, who had already had him imprisoned at the Abbaye on the eve of the massacre of September. Vainly he wrote from Holland letter upon letter to Lebrun, to remind him of his promises. Lebrun only gave him evasive answers, sent Beaumarchais to Pache the minister of war, and at last declared the government no longer wanted the guns.

In the interval, the Legislative Assembly had given place to the Convention. One fine morning, the 1st December, 1792, Beaumarchais read in the "Gazette de la Haye" that he was accused of conspiracy, of secret correspondence with Louis XVI., of dilapidation, and that they have for a third time put

seals on his house. His friends write to him at the same time, and inform him that it was contemplated sending a courier to have him arrested in Holland, and bring him bound hand and foot to Paris, with the chance of being massacred on the road — they begged him to return immediately to England. He set out for London. There he received the report presented to the Convention by Laurent Lecointre; a report in which the deputy, deceived by those who for eight months had sought to deprive Beaumarchais of a deplorable business which he ought to have resigned to them a hundred times, falsified the facts in the grossest manner, including in the same accusation of dilapidation and conspiracy the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" and the two last constitutional ministers of Louis XVI., de Graves and Chambonas. "These vile, grasping men," said Lecointre, "before plunging the country into the abyss they had prepared for it, disputed for the execrable honour of tearing from it its last covering." As for Beaumarchais, in particular, he is politely described by Lecointre, "an essentially vicious man, corrupt by inclination, who has reduced immorality to a principle, and *villany to a system.*" Now, the only villany of the unfortunate speculator consisted in having risked in this most detestable affair 745,000 francs of contracts, producing a yearly income of 72,000 francs, against 500,000 assignats worth, at the rate of 1792, 300,000

francs, with the prospect of losing both his deposit of 745,000 francs, the guns he had paid for in Holland, and at last to be guillotined into the bargain.

But the former enemy of Goëzman loves discussion too well to let himself be silently guillotined. On seeing his decree of accusation, he prepared to return to Paris to plead in person before the Convention, as if it were the Maupeou Parliament, when he was stopped by an unexpected obstacle. The English merchant, his friend and correspondent, who had lent him a month before a rather considerable sum expended in Holland, had but slight confidence in the judicial proceedings of the Convention, and was too interested in the preservation of his debtor to let him leave England before paying him. "It was too much for him," Beaumarchais wrote naïvely to Gudin, "to lose both his money and his friend." The London merchant began by arresting his dear friend himself; whilst otherwise making his life as easy as possible, he had him shut up in a house of detention for debt, called the King's Bench Prison. A man of a less combative disposition than Beaumarchais would have thought, perhaps, that in January, 1793, at the time of appearing before the Convention under the weight of a capital accusation, it was no great misfortune to be detained, on the other side of the Channel, in a prison of not much strictness, by a friendly and obliging creditor, who

did not allow him to want anything. But at sixty the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" had lost none of his stubborn ardour. He was also excited by the circumstance that the Convention held his family and fortune as hostages. He only thought of returning to re-commence his continual occupation of suitor; and whilst the faithful cashier Gudin, in the midst of the ruin of all property, occupied himself in procuring the funds necessary to repay his English creditor, he devoted the forced leisure of his imprisonment in drawing up a long memorial to the Convention, and wrote to the President of that assembly to inform him of his speedy return to Paris—so determined was he to defend himself against the accusations of Lecointre. As soon as his creditor is paid, he leaves prison, quits England, arrives in Paris in March, 1793, with his Memorial, has six thousand copies of it published, sends it to all the sections, all the clubs, all the authorities of the time, and fears not to wrestle boldly with all the unpopularity that hangs over him. "I have come," he wrote to the formidable Santerre, then Commandant of the National Guard, "I have come to offer my head to the sword of justice if I cannot prove I am a great citizen. Save me, Citizen Commandant, from pillage and the dagger, and I shall again be serviceable to my country." Other persons were contented to save their fortune and their head; that did not satisfy Beau-

marchais: he must still prove he is a *great citizen.* It is rather amusing that the great patriot Santerre, who, it is known, before becoming a general was a brewer in the Faubourg St. Antoine, seems to have a certain deference for his correspondent. His answer, which we reproduce literally, shows that, as regards style and orthography, this great patriot was about equal to the Duke de Fronsac.

"*Citoien,*—Je reçois votre lettre et vos imprimés. Je n'ai jamais ajouté foy aux calomnies sur votre voyage de *Londre;* je n'y ai vu qu'une démarche *util* à la république. Je ne vous ai connû que voulant faire le bien des pauvres. Je pense que vous n'avez pas à craindre le pillage ni le poignard; cependant, malgré que la vérité ne soit qu'une il est nécessaire d'éclairer ceux que nous croyons *trompé.*

"Une affiche au peuple ferait, je pense, bien.

"Le citoyen Célerier fut celui qui me remit vos premiers imprimés que j'ai *distribué.*

"SANTERRE,

"Commandant-Général.

"Ce 23 Mars, 1793, l'An 2."

It is unnecessary to add, that Beaumarchais followed the advice given by Santerre, and issued a fresh placard to the people, which he had been continually doing from the commencement of the Revolution; he also sent his Memorial to the Jacobins, with the following note:—

"Every good citizen unjustly accused, ought to be entirely occupied in justifying himself to the nation. This is what the citizen Beaumarchais is doing, by publishing the 'Six

Epochs,' and he begs the assembly, which is the mother of all patriotic societies, to accept a copy, whilst waiting for the decision of the National Convention.

"April 12, Year 2 of the Republic."

We will pass rapidly over this voluminous address of Beaumarchais' to the Convention, which the author divided into Six Epochs, to mark the different phases through which this affair of the guns had passed from its commencement in 1792 until March 1793. Gudin thought he ought to give the whole of this long work in his edition of the works of his friend: he should have contented himself with an abridgment; for, if it gives some interesting details of the history of the men and manners of the time, its style is in general feeble, and the multiplied calculations it contains about the subject of supplies render it painful to read. In a word, as M. Sainte-Beuve justly says, "A singular and unexpected thing happened to Beaumarchais; he became tedious." It may be well imagined that the author was not aware of the excessive length which gives such weight to his pleadings when, worn out and old, he defended his fortune and his life; but Gudin might have thought that posterity, not having the same interest in the law-suit, would find the justification rather tiresome: he would have done better to have shortened the first part of the affair, and to have related the second, which remains unknown and

presents more interest than the first. Still, if this work is in parts tedious, it is far from meriting the criticism a writer published, who no doubt had never read it, when he says, Beaumarchais appeared as timid before the Convention as he had been bold before the Maupeou Parliament.

Far from being timid, this address is sometimes astonishing from its boldness, when we think of the times, and remember that the author was in the power of the expeditious judges to whom he had addressed himself. One might often think he had not a clear idea of what was passing around him, and that he fancied he was still at an epoch when the government was satisfied with *blaming* audacious suitors. Thus he writes, with a force free from all oratorical artifice: "I would defy the devil to advance any business, in this frightful time of disorder that they call liberty." Then he pays a homage to the young and virtuous Sombreuil, before whom, he says, "my soul bowed down at the Abbaye, at the approach of the 2nd of September." Further on, again, he ridicules the Jacobin Marat, then in his full power, as he would have done with Goëzman, without troubling himself to learn if the Jacobin Marat did not enjoy sufficient influence to do him a great injury. "A little man," he said, "with black hair, snub nose, a frightful countenance, came, spoke in a low voice to the President; shall I tell you, O,

my readers? It was the *great,* the *just,* in a word the *merciful* Marat." Elsewhere he courageously defends the two ministers of Louis XVI., whose names had been put into the same decree of accusation with him, and he says quite plainly: "In this national affair the *royalist ministers* have alone done their duty, and every obstacle has come from the popular ministers." "I was annoyed under our old administration," he writes in another page: "the ministers tormented me, but the annoyances of those were but jokes compared to the horrors of these;" and he finishes with this peroration, which is not wanting in eloquence, but above all is not wanting in courage:—

"O, my country in tears! O, unhappy French! what use will it have been to you to have thrown down bastilles, if robbers dance upon them, and slaughter us on their ruins? *True friends of liberty!* know that its first executioners are license and anarchy; join your cries to mine, and let us ask laws of the deputies, who have only been named our proxies on this condition. Let us make peace with Europe. Was not the greatest day of our glory, that in which we declared it to the world? Let us strengthen our interior; let us form a constitution without disputes, without storms, and above all, if possible without crimes. Your maxims will be established; they will spread much better than by war, murder, and devastation, *if people see you are happy through them.* Are you so? Let us be sincere. Is it not with the blood of Frenchmen that our earth is watered? Speak! is there one of us, who has not had to shed tears? Peace, laws, a constitution—without these benefits, there is no country, and certainly no liberty."

To write, sign, and publish such things on the 6th March, 1793, to stop in Paris after having published them until after the 31st May, was certainly the act of a man who did not fear danger, and M. Sainte-Beuve very well described the man and the situation, when he said on this subject: "What astonishes me is, that he preserved his head." It is probable, indeed, that Beaumarchais would have shared the fate of so many other victims, much less compromised than himself, but for an unforeseen circumstance: he proved by the most undoubted evidence that the report of Lecointre, which led to his accusation, was but a tissue of folly and lies. His position with the government was that of a man who had received for a supply of guns 500,000 francs in assignats, worth 300,000 francs, who had deposited 745,000 francs as security, who could not furnish the supply agreed upon, because the government had not given him the support it had promised, and who said to the government: "You have failed in your engagement to assist me by a fresh remittance of money, and by the intervention of your minister in Holland to send for the guns I have bought for you, and which the Dutch Government retain by force. at Tervère. I am ready to return you the 500,000 francs in assignats that you have advanced me; return me the 745,000 francs in contracts that you made me deposit, and we shall be clear. I shall have to lose

the expenses of my journey, and my trouble. I shall make the best I can of the guns at Tervère, and on your side, you will procure arms where you can."

This just and reasonable conclusion for ordinary times would, in March, 1793, infallibly have conducted Beaumarchais to prison, to go a little later where people were then taken on leaving prison; but the government, which till then had seemed to care little enough about these guns, declared they were indispensable. France was, indeed, attacked on all parts; after the execution of Louis XVI. England united with all the continental powers against her. The Committee of Public Safety proposed to the Convention to *suspend* the decree of accusation against Beaumarchais, and to erase the order of sequestration upon his property: they afterwards sent for him, and gave him a choice between a condemnation with its consequences, and the agreeable mission of going a second time into an enemy's country (for Holland had at this time definitively entered into the coalition) to fetch sixty thousand guns retained at Tervère. The task had become much more difficult, for the publicity given to the silly report of Lecointre had determined the English Government, since the month of January, 1793, to take measures for seizing these guns as French property. But Beaumarchais, who always had his wits about him, having had wind of this project at the

very time he was imprisoned in London, had induced the English merchant, his correspondent and friend, who had incarcerated him, to become, in consideration of a large share, the fictitious purchaser of these guns, and to keep them at Tervère, in his name, as English property, till the true proprietor could dispose of them. But this fictitious purchaser could not retain them long, for the Cabinet of London said to him, "Either you are the real proprietor of these guns, or you are not; if you are, we are ready to reimburse you the value of them; if you are not, we mean to confiscate them." The Englishman, faithful to his engagement with Beaumarchais, resisted, affirming that the guns were his property; asserting his right to dispose of them as he liked: and that respect for the law, which distinguishes and honours the English amongst all governments, leaving the question yet undecided, the guns remained at Tervère, where they were, however, watched by an English ship.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BEAUMARCHAIS AGENT FOR THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY ABROAD, AND AT THE SAME TIME ON THE LIST OF EMIGRANTS.—DIFFICULTIES OF HIS MISSION.—CONFISCATION OF HIS PROPERTY.—IMPRISONMENT OF HIS FAMILY.—PRIVATE LIFE AT PARIS, DURING AND AFTER THE REIGN OF TERROR.—BEAUMARCHAIS AT HAMBURG.

Such was the state of things with regard to these unfortunate guns, when the Committee of Public Safety signified to Beaumarchais that he was to set out again for these arms; and that if he did not bring them to France, or at least prevent their falling into the hands of enemies, his family and property, in default of his person, would be answerable for the success of the operation.

Beaumarchais urged that, in an affair that was now so much known, he wanted money more than ever, to avoid the increased obstacles that shackled him; the Committee had all his property at their disposal, and his contracts to the amount of 745,000 francs; the least they could do was to furnish him with the means of fulfilling the very difficult mission they imposed on him. The Committee, wishing to have the guns at any price, made a fresh remittance to

Beaumarchais of 618,000 francs in assignats, worth then about 200,000 francs, promising to remit more money if it were necessary, and to adopt, at his request, any plan that seemed to him necessary for recovering the arms. A resolution of the Committee, dated 22nd May, 1793, signed Breard, Guyton, Barrere, Danton, Robert Lindet, Delacroix, Cambon, and Delmas, invested the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" with the title of Commissioner of the Republic for a secret foreign mission. And now, in his sixty-second year, he sets out again, in June, 1793, under the false name of Pierre Charron, assisted by two friends, who have also changed their names, to go this time at a period of open war, in the very midst of the enemies of France, to fetch for France sixty thousand guns. To tell the innumerable turnings and windings he had to make to avoid the dangers of this second mission, going from Amsterdam to Bâle, from Bâle to Hamburg, from Hamburg to London, where he received an order to quit in less than three days; to expose the numerous subterfuges that he was obliged to employ to prevent the Dutch and the English from carrying off these guns; to relate how he successively passed them through the hands of three fictitious purchasers; how he at last still fictitiously sold them to a merchant of the United States, with the determination of sending them, if needful, even to America, and fetching them back

thence to France; to enter into the details of all these manœuvres, which Beaumarchais directed like the intrigue of a complicated comedy, would be too long. By these means he succeeded in retaining the guns at Tervère, and when the time appeared favourable to him, he earnestly entreated the Committee of Public Safety to hasten the catastrophe by giving an order to General Pichegru to advance and carry off the guns; but the Committee, absorbed by a thousand affairs at the same time, allowed him to struggle alone in the difficulties of an affair which could now only be decided by force of arms. The only missive he received at this period from the Committee of Public Safety is this note from Robert Lindet, dated Pluviôse, Year 5 (January 26, 1794), showing plainly, it appears to me, in its hasty conciseness, the sort of fever which devoured these dictators, contending, as they were, with all Europe:—

"We must have celerity," Lindet wrote; "you must not wait for the result of events. If you delay too long, the service will not be appreciated; we must have great services, and they must be rendered quickly. We do not calculate the difficulties; we look only to the results and the success."

Whilst Beaumarchais did his best to execute the orders of the Committee of Public Safety, the Committee not only abandoned him to himself, but with a thoughtlessness which is a sign of the times, it

allowed its agent to be placed on the list of *émigrés;* it allowed his property to be seized, the arrears of his 745,000 francs deposited by him to be stopped, and imprisoned his family. The department of Paris not knowing the cause of Beaumarchais' absence, and looking upon his property as fair game, had at first thought fit to declare him an *émigré,* to replace the seals on his goods, and to stop all payments to him. Upon the remonstrance of Madame Beaumarchais, the Committee of Public Safety had given, dated Frimaire 25, Year 2 (December, 1793), a decision, by which it declared "that the citizen Beaumarchais was fulfilling a secret mission, and ordered that he should not be treated as an *émigré.* (Signed in the Register: Carnot, Billaud-Varennes, Robert Lindet, Robespierre, Barrère, Saint-Just, Couthon, C. A. Prieur.)" Upon this decision the seals were removed. Three months afterwards, Ventôse 24, Year 2, in the midst of the anarchical conflict of powers at this time, the Committee of General Safety had taken the liberty of annulling the order of the Committee of Public Safety, and of declaring Beaumarchais once more an *émigré,* and the Department of Paris had afresh placed the seals on his real estate, confiscated all his claims, and all his income.

An unpublished letter, written later, in April, 1796, to the minister of police, by Robert Lindet, on the subject of the proscription of the author of "The

Marriage of Figaro," seems useful to reproduce here, at least in parts, because it gives us a good idea of the administrative disorder, under the Terror, and of the strange position of the agent of the Committee of Public Safety, and afterwards, because Lindet, being incontestably one of the most active and least decried of this celebrated committee, his testimony in favour of Beaumarchais is honourable for the latter:—

"You ask me," writes Robert Lindet, to the minister of police, dated 24th Germinal, Year 4 (April, 1796); "you ask for information as to the duration of the second mission of citizen Beaumarchais, and as to the time this mission was, or ought to have been, concluded.

"In intrusting the citizen Beaumarchais with a mission, the Committee of Public Safety proposed two things. The first was to procure more than fifty thousand guns deposited in the magazines at Tervère as articles of commerce; the second was to prevent these guns falling into the power of the enemy.

"The Committee only bound itself to purchase and pay the price agreed upon for these guns, on condition that they should be delivered and placed at its disposal in one of the ports of the Republic in the course of five or six months. The transaction might require more time, but they employed these terms in the treaty to excite the zeal of citizen Beaumarchais.

"The time had not expired when he sent from Holland to Paris his friend, Citizen Durand, who had accompanied him, to give an account to the Committee of the obstacles which retarded the success of the enterprise, and to propose measures which he thought useful.

"They did not take any course on the new measures, because the government would not undertake the risk of the enterprise. They sent back the citizen Durand to the citizen Beaumarchais, viséing his passport, to enable him '*to return to his destination and continue his mission;*' for it seemed important these guns should be procured for the government, at whatever time it might be, or that the enemy should be prevented seizing them, and distributing them in Belgium among the partisans of the house of Austria.

"The Department of Paris placed the citizen Beaumarchais on the list of *émigrés*, and had the seals placed on his property. The Committee came to a resolution to the effect that the citizen Beaumarchais, being on a mission, ought not to be considered as an *émigré*, his absence being on account of the Republic. The Department removed the seals.

"Some time after they replaced citizen Beaumarchais on the list of emigrants. There was no fresh reason for considering him an *émigré;* his mission was not finished, his negotiation was still useful; he had not been recalled. They had sent citizen Durand to him, with an order to continue his operations. They persisted, notwithstanding, in considering him as an *émigré*. It was impossible then to give an open explanation respecting this action, because it would have been necessary to make known the object of a mission, the secrecy of which was of consequence to the Republic.* The presence of citizen Beaumarchais in a foreign country was necessary, until the time when, the secret mission having been divulged from the tribune, the English transported the guns from Tervère into their ports.

* Robert Lindet will not acknowledge here that it was upon an order of the Committee of General Safety that the department of Paris again replaced on the list of emigrants Beaumarchais, who was the agent of the Committee of Public Safety; but the conflict of the authorities at this epoch is sufficiently seen in this letter.

"Nothing would have prevented citizen Beaumarchais from returning to France, as he had no longer any hope of fulfilling his mission; but he was placed on the list of *émigrés;* he could not return till he had his name crossed out.

"His name was unjustly placed on the list of *émigrés,* since he was absent on the service of the Republic.

"ROBERT LINDET."

In another letter the old member of the Committee of Public Safety insists again with the minister of the police, Cochon, in favour of Beaumarchais:—

"I shall never cease," he writes, "to think, and to declare on every occasion, that the citizen Beaumarchais is unjustly persecuted, that the ridiculous project of making him pass for an emigrant has only been thought of by men blinded, deceived, or ill-intentioned. His capacity, his talents, all his resources might be useful to us. They have wished to injure him, but they injure France more. I wish I could express to him how much I have been affected by the injustice of which he has been the object. I fulfil a duty, and I fulfil it with satisfaction when I think of him.

"ROBERT LINDET.

"Paris, Nivose 16, Year 4."

But if Lindet, who was himself a suspected person in 1796, felt the necessity of rendering a tardy justice to Beaumarchais, he did not the less allow him to be sacrificed during the height of the Terror; for, not satisfied with having seized his property, the Committee of General Safety, by an order of the 17th Messidor, Year 2 (July 5, 1794), signed Dubarran, Lavicomterie, Elie Lacoste, and Amar, had

arrested and imprisoned the wife, sister, and daughter of the man whom the Committee of Public Safety had charged with a secret mission.

Thanks to this division of opinion between the two Committees, two unfortunate women and a young girl of eighteen detained in the convent of Port-Royal, which was transformed into a prison, and which, by an atrocious mockery, was called Port-Free, waited their turn to ascend the fatal car, when the day of the 9th Thermidor put an end to these butcheries. Eleven days afterwards, the 21st Thermidor, Year 2, another order of the Committee of General Safety restored the *citoyennes* Caron to liberty.

During the sinister period of the Terror, Beaumarchais, a refugee at Hamburg, and deprived of all communication with his family, was a prey to dreadful agony. He felt that the non-success of his operations caused the danger of beings who were dear to him; he exhausted himself in efforts and manœuvres to prevent, at least, the English government carrying off by its authority these unfortunate guns, which, if they fell into the hands of the enemy, would both ruin him and compromise him horribly with the Committee of Public Safety. All the assignats of the Committee had been spent for their preservation; not receiving anything from France, he had himself fallen into a state of distress, which indeed lasted but

an instant, but which was extreme.* His correspondence shows periods of terrible despair, in which he asks himself if he is not mad. "I sometimes examine myself," he writes at this epoch, "if I am not mad; and on seeing the immense series, the succession of ideas, by which I endeavour to ward off everything, I think I am not mad. But where am I to write to you?" he says to his wife; "under what name? where do you live? who are you? what name do you give yourself? who are your true friends? whom should I make mine? Ah! without the hope of saving my daughter from the atrocious guillotine, death would be preferable to the horrible state I am in." It was precisely to save his daughter that Madame de Beaumarchais had for a time broken off any correspondence with her husband, resumed her family name, and only endeavoured to make herself unknown. "As a mother," she wrote to him after the fall of Robespierre, "I had a right to employ every means to avoid for my beloved child the fate of so many innocent and worthy victims, now rehabilitated, regretted and mourned for, but whom all this regret, all these tears, and a tardy justice will not recall."

On leaving prison, after having been so close to death, the wife, daughter, and sister of Beaumarchais found themselves in a difficult position; all

* He soon after received money from an American correspondent.

the personal estate of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was sequestrated, all his income seized; all claims of debts that had been found in his desk, in virtue of the law applied to *émigrés*, had passed into the hands of the agents of the treasury, who took means to recover them, and his debtors hastened, even before their debts were due, to get clear of them, by paying them to the state in assignats. In a word, this deplorable affair of the guns was sufficient to give a mortal blow to a brilliant fortune laboriously acquired.

Meanwhile the sequestrated property was threatened with sale; the young daughter of Beaumarchais had a horror of the magnificent house on the boulevard, which, she said in a letter to her father, had so often exposed them to the insults of the mob, and had persuaded her mother to leave. It was urgent, to preserve this house from condemnation, and to defend it as much as possible from the rapacity of the treasury, that one of the family should resolve to inhabit it. It was Julie Beaumarchais who devoted herself, and who, on leaving prison, went, when sixty years of age, to install herself, with only an old female servant, in this deserted palace, guarded by agents of the Republic, and which had written on its walls, "National Property."

If, as I hope, the reader has retained an agreeable remembrance of Julie, he will like, perhaps, to see

again that witty, cheerful, courageous, and intelligent phisiognomy, which neither old age, privations, nor danger can alter.

A description of the private and domestic life of three women, formerly rich, exposed to the difficulties of a fearful epoch, might present interesting details of the time, which history rarely gives. We will take some of these details from the correspondence of Julie and her sister-in-law. Whilst the head of the family was proscribed, it was Madame de Beaumarchais, a person of uncommon merit, uniting to the graces of the woman the energy of a man, who bore all the weight of the situation; and who, whilst working on one side to stop the sale of the property of her husband, and on the other to obtain the removal of his name from the fatal list, was obliged to provide for the general support with what she had been able to save from the shipwreck. On her part Julie, who kept her brother's house, made her sister acquainted with all the attacks of the treasury, and excited her to resistance, in the animated and original style which characterised her:—

"Morbleu! my child," she wrote to her, after the Terror, "let us promptly have this decree, (the order of removal, from the list). Here are the fruits, as they were last year, brought into requisition; the cherries being ripe, they are going to gather and sell them to-morrow, and the other things in time, and then close the garden to the profane and gluttonous. Is it not delightful to occupy this solitary house for six months, and to eat none of its fruit except the stones,

and they will sell even them with the rest. It is for the birds I speak; for, as for myself, I never thought, considering the price these things sell at, that there would be much left for us, even though the garden is ours. However, it is a pity the agency have put their noses in here this year. The gardener from that authority came yesterday; they are going to have a sale one of these days; see whether you will bid or rather prevent this robbery by some decisive act towards the agency: and since they have suspended the inventory, why will they not also leave our fruits suspended to the trees? On my honour, I believe we shall never get out of this state of things. What times!

"Here is a pound of veal they bring me for 28 francs, and yet it is cheap: it is worth 30. Rage! Fury! Curses! How can one live ruining one's self, and spending three times one's fortune? How happy are those who have gone before me! They do not feel the beatings of my head, the tears that are in my eyes, nor my devouring fever, nor my teeth, sharpened to eat 28 francs' worth of veal; they feel nothing of our misfortunes."

These 28 francs' worth of veal that Julie consumed with amusing anger, leads us to say a word on the curious state of famine, caused by the increasing depreciation of the assignats after the Reign of Terror. It will still be Julie who will inform us how persons lived at this time; her sister-in-law had just remitted her 4000 francs in assignats, and she gives an account of the use she made of these assignats, in December, 1794:—

"When you gave me these 4000 francs, dear friend, my heart beat. I thought you had become simple to give me such a fortune; I put them quickly into my pocket, and spoke on other subjects, to divert your thoughts.

"I returned home, and called out quickly for wood, provisions, before everything increases still more. There is Dupont (the old woman servant) running and doing her best; the scales fall from my eyes, when I see, without the food for the month, this result of the 4275 francs:—

One load of wood . . .	1460	francs.
9 lbs. of candles, eights, at 100 fr. the pound	900	„
4 lbs. of sugar, at 100 francs the pound .	400	„
3 Litrons of corn, at 40 francs . .	120	„
7 lbs. of oil, at 100 francs . . .	700	„
12 Wicks, at 5 francs . . .	60	„
1½ Bushel of potatoes, at 200 francs the bushl.	300	„
Washing, for the month . .	215	„
1 lb. of hair powder . . .	70	„
2 ounces of pomatum, (at 3 sous formerly) now at 25 francs . . .	50	„
	4275	„
In addition, the food for the month—butter and eggs at 100 francs, as you know, meat from 25 to 30 francs, and all in proportion	567	
The bread has missed two days; we only receive now one loaf every second day, from the increase of expense; the last ten days I have only bought 4 lbs. at 45 francs	180	„
	5022	„

"When I think of this *regal* expenditure, as you call it, which makes me spend from 18 to 20,000 francs without living, and without any comfort, I send the government to the devil: it is true that these 20,000 francs* represent 6 or

* Beaumarchais had settled on his sister Julie a pension of 4000 francs, and, instead of being paid in specie, it was now necessarily paid in assignats.

7 louis, while my 4000 francs were worth 160, which makes a difference."

In a few days the value of the assignats lowered, and the price of provisions increased in a frightful proportion; for, in another letter to her sister-in-law, Julie gives us the following details:—

"Ten thousand francs that I have scattered during the last fortnight give me such fear and sorrow, that I no longer know how to reckon my income in this manner; three days have made a rise in the wood of from 4200 francs to 6500, all other expenses in proportion; so that, as I have told you, the load of wood carried up and arranged in order costs me 7100 francs. Every week, now, we must reckon from 700 to 800 francs for a *pot-au-feu*, and other sorts of meat for ragouts, without the butter, the eggs, and a thousand other details; the washing also increases every day to such an extreme that 8000 livres a month would not be sufficient for it. This enrages me; and in all these expenses, I swear by the holy truth of my heart that I have not for the last two years allowed myself a single whim, nor any other expense than the house-keeping; however, I have some private and urgent ones, for which I must have heaps of assignats."

Beaumarchais' sister was exposed to the rigour of famine; his wife and daughter were not better off. I see, in the correspondence of Madame de Beaumarchais, that one of her friends walked about the environs of Paris to try to procure her some bread, which for a few days was scarcer than diamonds. "They say here," he writes from Soizy, Prairial 17, Year 3 (5th June 1795), "that at Brirae one can have flour; if it were so, I would bar-

gain with a safe man in this neighbourhood, who would take it to your house by the passage-boat, which goes from Briare to Paris; but all that very much increases the price. You will let me know what you think of it; in the meanwhile, I do not despair of getting hold of some rolls. Ah! if I had the gift of miracles, I would shower on you, not manna from heaven, but some good and very white bread."

On learning, in his exile, all the misery that afflicted his family, Beaumarchais also learned they had strength of mind to support it—that cheerfulness had not quite disappeared from this formerly joyous family; they were exposed to death from hunger, but the frightful axe was no longer employed, and they began to breathe.

"Here," writes one of his old friends to him, "comes the soup tureen of the family, that is to say, you see on the *mahogany* table (for we have now no table-cloth) a small dish of haricots, two potatoes, a small *carafon* of wine, and plenty of water. Your daughter wants a poodle to serve her for a napkin and to clean her plate; notwithstanding that, come, come; if we had not something to eat, we should have something to laugh at. Come, for your wife and child want a miller, since their drawing-room is decorated with a flour-mill; whilst your Eugenie will charm thine ear with her forte-piano, you will prepare the bread for her breakfast, your wife will knit your stockings, and your future son-in-law will be the baker; for here each person has his trade, and that is the reason our cows are so well kept. It is a funny sight, to see our women without wigs in the morning, each fulfilling some *ancillary* occupation; for you must know that

each of us has put himself to work, which explains why in our *régime*, if there are no longer any masters, there are still servants. This letter costs you at least 100 francs, including the paper, the pen, the ink, and the lamp oil; finally, for economy, I have written it at your house. We all embrace you, anyhow and through everything.

Another more serious friend of Beaumarchais, the *littérateur* Gudin, will give us, however, a truer and sadder aspect of Paris after the Terror, in an unpublished letter to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," then a refugee at Hamburg. The predictions of Gudin were not verified, but they show us under what sombre colours the future then presented itself to clear and intelligent minds.

"My most ardent desire, my friend," wrote Gudin, "is to see you again, and press you to my heart; but circumstances are such that they have forced me to quit Paris, where I could no longer subsist. I have taken refuge in a little village, fifty miles away, where there are but thirteen peasants' cabins. The house I inhabit was a very little priory, occupied by a single monk. Returning to Paris for four days to regulate some affairs, I find this city, formerly so superb, presenting only the spectacle of a large country under a ban, where everything falls to ruin. The men are dressed like misers; the young women, led away by the desire of pleasing, affect a display which would have seemed to us, formerly, but poverty masked, and hiding its misery badly. There is no longer a public, or public opinion, nor even a general interest; all is now party spirit, all that does not belong to a faction is annihilation. It is the fruit which the system of such *execrable men* as the Robespierres, Couthons, Saint-Justs, Marats, Carriers, and Fouquier-Tinvilles, and other brigands who are too slightly punished by death, must produce: they have destroyed

arts, commerce, manufactures, and every source of national wealth. They have formed armies five or six times larger than the Roman empire had to conquer the world. To prevent these great armies attacking the citizens like those of Marius and Sylla, they have torn from the citizens the little subsistence which they still had. That is their policy and only care; it is necessary to make the citizens constantly contribute, and strip them of everything, that the enemy, or our own armies, may not put them under contribution. War is supported by war; the poorer a people are, the more willing are they to become soldiers, to live either on their pay, or by marauding. We are precisely like the Spartans, of whom the Athenians said, 'They are so wretched in their city, that they take shelter by crowds in their camps, to find a little less misery. As for me, I cannot follow this plan; I have taken refuge in a little hamlet. I wait till peace brings other men and other principles. Far from my friends, far from the arts, far from libraries, I live like Ovid, in the midst of barbarians; my mind is supported by what it has previously acquired. I mourn because I am a man; I am not astonished at anything, because I have experience. All the crimes they now commit, and have committed for the last three or four years, have been committed frequently; they have not even the merit of novelty. And when we, who have received in our youth a good education and good examples, shall have descended to our tomb, we shall leave our places to men brought up in the midst of crime, in deep ignorance, surrounded by great monuments falling to ruins, without the means of repairing them, or of bringing up their children with care. Barbarism will cover the face of France, as it does that of Egypt, Greece, Assyria, Sicily, and Italy, and all the great empires that were formerly powerful: this may be afflicting, but it is quite ordinary.

"There are amongst the learned and the artists some old men who yet struggle with ardour for the progress of the

human mind; but there is no longer that cohort of young men who formerly supported and recruited them. I wish I could write more consolatory things to you, but I should be lying to myself if I spoke otherwise. The public wants have destroyed all idea of justice; those of the day destroy all foresight; people consume on the eve the resources of the morrow; the necessity to have obliges to take, and from whom can they take but from those who have? It is thus that since the most ancient times in *public troubles* the rich have always been the *public enemies*. Marius and Sylla did not proscribe the poor; they made them their satellites to strip the senators. There is no other kind of justice; that is what is called *salus populi*: the *Ciceros* are murdered by the *Lænas*. It is thus that many good people are silent, they wait for peace; if it comes when there are resources still left, they will make use of them; if it comes too late, they will die with the feelings of a good conscience, and the certainty that their efforts have been useless.

"Adieu, my dear friend; I should have liked better to have spoken of you, of your family, of those whom you love, of the regret we all feel at not being able to meet. Our hearts are like yours, overwhelmed with grief. You know all they would say to you; and as to the details of individual adventures, the cares, the troubles, the constantly recurring uneasiness, of endeavours lost and always recommenced under a thousand different forms, it would require volumes to give you but a very feeble notion of them—it is impossible to have an idea of them. Imagine the labyrinth of Crete on the crater of Vesuvius; that is where those dwell who wish to serve their friends.

"I embrace you, and sigh for the happy moment that will re-unite us. GUDIN."

Whilst his family and friends courageously supported the dangers and griefs of this sad epoch of our

history, Beaumarchais, at the same time a commissioner and a proscribed man, continued to struggle in the midst of the difficulties of an act of impossibility. During two years, from June 1793 to May 1795, he had at least succeeded by subterfuges in keeping the sixty thousand guns from the rapacity of the English, when a new incident occurred which rendered all his efforts useless. In the middle of the quarrels which succeeded the fall of Robespierre, a fresh discussion took place in the tribune about these unfortunate guns. Lecointre, with his usual heedlessness, denounced Beaumarchais again, and after having already accused him of complicity with the late ministers of Louis XVI., he accuses him now of having robbed the State in the affair of the guns retained at Tervère, and of connivance with the late ministers of the Committee of Public Safety. The ridiculous and intemperate ranting of Lecointre decided the English minister to waive the scruples of legality which had hitherto stopped him; notwithstanding the protestations of the American agent, he carried off the sixty thousand guns by force to Plymouth, declaring also that if these guns were not French property, they should be valued by an arbitrator, and paid for, to the person to whom they belonged by right.

This violent solution rendered the situation of Beaumarchais very trying; for if the English confiscated the guns without paying for them, he was

in a position to lose the sum expended by him in obtaining and preserving these arms, and at the same time would have to restore to the French Government all the sums they had advanced him in assignats upon his deposit of 750,000 livres. However, the English Government, in face of the claims of the fictitious proprietor, behind whom was concealed the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," did not think they could go so far as to confiscate them; they made an arbitrary estimation of the arms, and paid a sum far below their value to the person who lent his name to Beaumarchais in June, 1795. From this moment the mission of the latter was finished; he demanded to return to France, to give up his accounts, and to put an end to so strange a position as that of an agent of the government charged with a foreign mission, and at the same time inscribed in his own country on the list of *emigrés*, his possessions seized, and all his income confiscated. But it was more easy to place his name on the fatal list than to get it erased, and Madame de Beaumarchais vainly pursued all the authorities of the day with solicitations:—

"A law is made to day," she wrote to her husband in June, 1795; "four days after, it is re-called. Thus they took away from the Committee of Legislation the power of striking off the names of emigrants; they have now given it back. In the interval we have lost our reporter, who has left the Committee of Public Safety in his turn, and set out on a

mission. It was necessary to speak to his successor to instruct him, to rouse him, &c., &c. In virtue of this new decree, we thought that the committees could alone decide our affair. Not at all so; at the Legislative Committee they told us, that it was to the Committee of Public Safety that we must at once go, as it was already in possession of the affair. We went there; but when we expected they could positively conclude it, they told us the Convention was taken by surprise, the affair could only be terminated by a decree, and not by a resolution; it was a government affair—quite aspecial case. So that if my dear Peters, instead ot having had a mission, had fled since the 31st of May from fear, we could furnish proofs of it, everything would be explained, and he might profit by a decree which restores, and puts in possession of their property, those even who have been outlawed. These are contradictions one can hardly support.

"We can assure you our courage will not slacken, and we shall obtain the victory."

Whilst waiting till it pleased the government to put an end to the absurd injustice of which he was the victim, Beaumarchais forgot his personal situation to interest himself in public affairs.* I see him

* The city of Hamburg was then the residence of a rather large number of emigrants of distinction. Beaumarchais visited some of them. He saw a great deal of Talleyrand, who was there, after his return from America, waiting, like himself, to be struck off the list. He was particularly intimate with the Abbé Louis, afterwards Baron Louis, Minister of Finance under the Restoration, who was then called Joseph Louis. Beaumarchais had got him into a commercial house by lending him money for it. The letters of M. l'Abbé Louis express great gratitude and affection towards Beaumarchais, who, with his usual sagacity, could appreciate the talents

writing from Hamburg numerous memorials, either to various influential persons of the time, or to those in authority, with whose names he was sometimes unacquainted, to transmit opinions upon general questions which excited his solicitude. From amongst all these unpublished memorials I will cite but one, which appears to me honourable to the man who wrote it. He has just learnt in his exile the victory gained at Quiberon over the royalist party. He is yet unaware of the frightful use made by Tallien of that victory, in spite of a capitulation; but he dreads a massacre, and although he does not enjoy any influence, his conscience leads him to write to the Committee of Public Safety the following Memorial, of which, I think, I ought to reproduce a large part:—

"From my Retreat near Hamburg.

"August 5, 1795.

"To the Committee of Public Safety.

"Citizens of whom the Committee is now formed, allow once more a citizen, unjustly banished from his country, which he has never ceased to serve, to address himself to you, not to plead his own interests, but to speak a moment of those which he believes to be yours and those of the nation.

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of his *protégé*, and foresee his brilliant destiny. During his forced leisure at Hamburg he wrote several things on various subjects, which are but sketches, but which occasionally contain interesting details. See Appendix, No. 26, a page of severe criticism on Jean Jacques Rousseau, which is, however, natural when we consider the strong points of the two characters.

"I remember, when in my youth the first child of the Dauphin, father of Louis XVI. was born. They took me from school to see the rejoicings. The night of the illuminations I was struck by a transparency placed on the top of a prison, with these energetic words, *Usque in tenebris!* They made such a deep impression on me, that I seem still to read them. *Public joy had entered even into the horrors of dungeons.* What the transparency said (the birth of a son to the Prince being the cause of the rejoicings of the time), I say to you to-day, upon a much more important subject. Joy at the superb triumph of our soldiers at Quiberon has passed into my heart, in the midst of a garret in Germany, in which I have groaned the last two years, hidden under an unknown name, at the injustice of every description, during which they lavish upon me in my own country. *Usque in tenebris* is the epigraph of my situation.

"It is on the consequences of the victory of Quiberon, decisive for the peace we all so much desire, that I am going to submit to you the reflections of a citizen *in tenebris.*

"If generous conquerors, you do not abuse your triumph to make a butchery of it, you will gain the esteem of all parties. It was after reverses that the Romans remained implacable enemies; they were great and generous as soon as they were successful. This conduct, equally noble and firm, gained them the empire of the world. That vengeance, which is the most complete and most fruitful of all, consists in treating the vanquished and yielding French with a generosity which will make all the others submit to you.

"Permit me to relate to you an example of the great effect of the conduct I point out; the resemblance of facts is striking.

"During the war of insurgent America against tyrannical England, an entire army of English and American loyalists (who were themselves emigres), descended from Upper Canada, by Lake Champlin and the rivers, under the orders

—if I recollect rightly—of General Burgoyne. When it reached the heart of the new Republic, this army was surrounded in the plains of Saratoga, and forced to lay down its arms and surrender at discretion. The general Congress, equally prudent and generous, felt that an honourable peace, and the basis of the government they were forming, depended, in the eyes of the nation, upon the use they made of this brilliant victory. They offered pardon to all whom they had conquered, and land to cultivate to all the English and Hessians who might wish to settle in the country they had attempted to subjugate. Washington, who when consulted, gave this noble advice, consolidated his great reputation, which nothing could destroy. The English government felt that a people who could make so noble a use of a triumph, would be henceforth invincible; for its generous conduct, by conquering every heart, gained every opinion.

"O Frenchmen! you who govern Frenchmen more divided among themselves than were the Americans; you who have, as members of an agitated assembly, brought back a number of hearts embittered by the horrible cruelties of those whom you have succeeded, without having been their accomplices. I doubt not you have felt as keenly as myself of what value is the event that fortune has presented to you. *Pardon your prisoners.* Whatever fate you may order for them, they have no right to complain of it. You have conquered them with arms in their hands; but learn to-day, if by chance you were ignorant of it, that there is not a single Frenchman amongst those conquered emigrants, who blushes to have been conquered by Frenchmen; and that there is not one among them who is not a more decided enemy than yourselves to these English who employ them. Know that it is only from the necessity of subsisting, and of not dying from hunger, that they have consented to submit to these arrogant islanders. Know especially that the minister Pitt is radically lost; if you adopt this idea, he will not be pardoned the uncertainty

of his conduct, the falseness of his measures, the nullity of his success; and while the general voice applauds your generosity, you will have done more to injure him, and more to advance yourselves and your own glory, and to secure stability and universal confidence—yes, you will have done more by one single generous act, than by all the almost incomprehensible exploits by which our armies have astonished all Europe. You alone will make peace, prescribe it, dictate it even to the English, a large part of whom detest the measures taken by their government, to embarrass you in the free form of yours.

"And citizens (I have already taken the liberty of writing this to you), if you are recognized in an honourable treaty by these English (whom vanity alone stops) *as a powerful and free people*—weigh these words, O citizens! O deputies! O convention!—you will have arrived at the summit of glory; for all Europe will follow, without hesitation, this great example. You will then have acquired, conquered, the great right of deliberating wisely, whether the government of one person alone, the strongest, the most complete and rapid of all in the execution of projects fully matured by a legislative assembly, suits a large country better than other subdivisions of this stormy power; you could modify this power to the wishes of the nation, proud herself of seeing you deliberate on this question peaceably, after such great success, after generous acts, which will leave no fear in the mind of any one of the return of that *terrorism* with which slaves are restrained, but which cannot be the basis of a sensible government.

"Pierre Augustin Caron Beaumarchais,
"Commissioned, proscribed, wandering, persecuted;
but neither a traitor, nor an *emigré*."

At the time when Beaumarchais wrote this letter the government of the Convention had but two

months longer to exist. It was soon replaced by that of the Directory and the two Councils. The ardent solicitations of the wife and friends of the proscribed man at last procured its erasure from the list of emigrants, and after three years' absence the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was able to return to his country.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BEAUMARCHAIS AFTER HIS RETURN TO FRANCE.—HIS LIFE UNDER THE DIRECTORY.—HIS DEATH.

Having returned to Paris on the 5th July, 1796, Beaumarchais found himself surrounded by the ruins of a large fortune, destroyed not only by the general crisis, which had destroyed that of so many other persons, but also by the effect of six successive seizures; by the confiscation of his revenues, the carrying off his papers, and the disappearance of everything but his debts. His beautiful house was defaced; his garden destroyed. At the very time when his debtors were freeing themselves from their debts, by paying them in assignats to the treasury, numerous creditors were waiting to seize him. He had accounts to render to and to receive from the State, which, after having sequestrated his fortune, still held in their hands the 745,000 francs, which he had deposited with them. He occupied himself at first in marrying his only daughter, "with a good young man," he says, in a letter already published by Gudin, "who persisted in wishing to marry her, when

it was thought I possessed nothing; she, her mother, and I, he adds, considered we ought to reward this generous attachment. Five days after my arrival I made him this handsome present."* When the happiness of his daughter was assured, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" had to regulate his accounts with the government, and to remedy, as he best could, the ravages which four years of law-suit and proscription had made in his fortune. His position

* The good young man to whom, in 1796, Beaumarchais gave his charming daughter, was M. André-Toussaint Delarue, who was in 1789 aide-de-camp to General Lafayette, administrator of the excise under the empire, colonel of the 8th legion of the National Guard under the Restoration, and under the government of July. In 1840 M. Delarue asked on account of his age to retire from his post of colonel; the Government, not wishing to separate itself from a man who had rendered honourable service in times of difficulty, obliged him to accept the grade of Maréchal du camp of the National Guard, a post which he occupied till February, 1848, when, at the age of eighty-four, he commanded a brigade. The son-in-law of Beaumarchais, at the time we are writing, is still living, surrounded in his vigorous old age by the affection of all those who have known how to appreciate the noble qualities of his heart and disposition. By his marriage with the only daughter of Beaumarchais, M. Delarue has had two sons, the eldest of whom, after having been successively page to the Emperor, orderly officer to King Louis-Philippe, and colonel of the 2nd regiment of Lancers, is now a general of Brigade. The second grandson of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" occupies the post of receiver of finances, and a great grandchild of Beaumarchais, who by her wit and grace does not belie her origin, has married M. Rouelleaux Dugage, formerly prefect under the government of July, now a member of the legislative body.

with the State, with regard to those unhappy guns, will not have been forgotten. He had received assignats in advance; he had deposited securities to the amount of the value of these advances; the whole of his income had been confiscated nearly four years; he had been obliged to expend considerable sums to prevent the English possessing themselves of the guns deposited at Tervère; and after having preserved these arms during four years, he found himself constrained to allow them to be carried off by force, and to accept the arbitrary price at which the English Government had thought fit to value them.

The question was then to fix the balance between the advances he had received in assignats, and the sum for the sale of the guns also received by him, on the one hand, and on the other, the property he had deposited as security, his revenues and his claims for debt, unjustly confiscated, the various sums expended by him for the preservation of the arms, by order of the Committee of Public Safety; in a word, whether to make him a debtor or a creditor of the Republic, according to the result of this balance. In general the government did not like to restore money, and this repugnance, in some degree normal, would be even increased in this case by the result of the whole operation, since the Republic had made advances upon securities, certainly, but they had not received the guns. On the other side, it was

not the fault of Beaumarchais, if, in the midst of the disorder of the times, after not having given him any assistance in a mission they had forcibly imposed on him, they had very unjustly confiscated all his property, and applied to the benefit of the State, the recovery of all his debts. The first examination of this difficult adjustment of accounts between Beaumarchais and the State lasted nearly two years. At last the Pluviose 4 year 6 (January, 1798), a commission named by the Directory, and composed of the citizens Golbéry, Deladreux, and Senovert, after a report very clearly made out, but very long, which consequently we do not produce, after having carefully balanced the claims of Beaumarchais on the republic, and those of the republic on Beaumarchais, declared the State remained a debtor towards the latter to the sum of 997,875 francs; including in that the 745,000 francs' worth of contracts, deposited by him as security at the commencement of the undertaking.

The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" claimed a larger sum, but it was a great victory to obtain from a not very scrupulous government so considerable a restitution. This sum would have enabled him to satisfy his most importunate creditors, and obtain a little tranquillity at the end of his life, when, by a fatality which caused the misery of his last days, the Directory thought right to name a new commission, which destroyed the work of the first. Refusing to give

an account to Beaumarchais of all the government had taken from him at a time when, without any reasonable motive, they had inscribed his name on the list of emigrants, and of the expenses caused for the preservation of the guns at Tervère, this fresh commission made him pass from the position of a creditor for 997,875 francs to that of a debtor for 500,000 francs. It was in struggling with the authorities against the decision of this last commission, that the old age of Beaumarchais was consumed. Whilst in consequence of this unjust decision, the government joined his real creditors in tormenting him, the latter did not give him a moment's rest; he found himself a prey to summonses, to seizures of his real and personal estate, to attorneys, tipstaffs, and bailiffs; in a word, to all the horrors of a broken fortune. He occupied a superb palace, which he could neither sell nor let; in the midst of the most urgent want, he could scarcely find sufficient to pay the taxes on the two hundred windows and the four iron gates which decorated this palace. An unpublished letter to the Minister of Finance, Ramel, written even before the new commission had raised his despair to its climax, will give an idea of his situation:—

"Germinal year 6, Paris, 30.

"Citizen Minister,—I swear to you my state becomes intolerable. I could have regulated the whole world with all I have written on this detestable affair, which wears out my mind and disgraces my old age. To meet with opposition

when I am myself so patient a creditor! Always in grief—always expecting without ever seeing anything come! Running, knocking everywhere, and never being able to terminate anything; it is the punishment of a slave, of a subject of the old régime, and not the life of a French citizen.

"Permit me to send a truckle-bed to a garret in your hotel. They will then say to you every day, '*He is there.*' You will realize then that a wretched man, for six years thrown out of his rank and ruined, is excusable for desiring persons should condescend to occupy themselves with his case.

"CARON BEAUMARCHAIS."

The feeling of his private griefs was always with Beaumarchais associated with general reflections. It was thus he wrote about the same time, the 10th Prairial year 6, to a high functionary:—

"I received the day before yesterday, kind citizen, a little consolation in your name from the citizen Meunier-Dubreuil, although the information he announced to me from the office of the minister, relatively to contributions, oppositions, contradictions, and other words in *iorns*, out of which my present troubles are composed, has not yet arrived. I have read, not without some pleasure, the motive which makes you prefer his friendly dinner to mine: he offers me a seat at his table near you, and I reply, *Yes, certainly!*—provided my great debtor, and all my sad creditors have left the pavement of the street free to me, which is becoming very uncertain. The finest fortune of a French pioneer of every description, has melted away in a mass of rogueries, without the profit of a crown to the French Republic; and I often say to myself, 'All Europe is in trouble and very poor; where the devil, then, has all the fortune of Europe gone?' The answer that I make to myself is, that it has not gone at all. It consisted in circulations of every description. Work has ceased everywhere; our youth, who

destroy themselves in destroying the youth of our enemies, consume, without profit, the subsistence of the few workmen who are left. *Abyssus abyssum*, &c.

"Good day, *Monsieur*, if that word does not annoy you. We have become rather foolish on the subject of titles; but those which are repeated and circulated among equals, do not infringe the holy equality. The *Monseigneur* cannot be returned unless it is amongst bishops; upon the acknowledged principle, *Inter sese fricant asini*, it has deserved its banishment; but if you are all *sieurs* to me, and I am a *sieur* to all you, who can be hurt by that? *Citizen*, which comes from city, refers to a town. From Rome proceeded the Roman citizen; from Athens, Argos, or Corinth, came the *citizens* belonging to these *cities;* but we, who pique ourselves on being great persons, call ourselves *citizens of France*. Is not France a city? It is thus we call *patriots* thousands of persons without lands, although the word *patrie* is derived from the patrimony they should possess. Persons who have nothing, howl about this sacred title with indifference, by which they degrade and destroy it. That is the reason which makes me approve of rewarding our soldiers by lands, who, without that, would be hordes. And as for myself, I find I am but a gossip,—that is the fault of age.

"Respect and gratitude,

"Caron Beaumarchais."

In this correspondence of his old age, Beaumarchais does not seem always animated with a very lively interest for republican institutions. However, some intimate letters announced a certain taste for the new regime, when there was not exhibited too much irritation from the tricks and violence of one party towards the other. For example, he was present at a dinner

where there was an assemblage of patriots, and gave the account of his impressions in the following letter to one of his friends, dated 24 Germinal year 5:—

"I had yesterday, my dear Charles, a dinner, the remembrance of which will remain a long time in my memory, from the choice collection of guests that our friend Dumas (General Dumas) had assembled at his brother's house.

"Formerly, when I dined at the houses of any of the great men of the state, I was always shocked at the collection of persons of all characters, whose birth was the sole cause of their admission. Fools of quality, simpletons who had places, men proud of their riches, impudent young fellows, coquettes, &c. If it was not the ark of good Noah, it was at least the court of King Pétaut; but yesterday, of the four-and-twenty persons at table, there was not one whose personal merit did not entitle him to the post he occupied. It was, if I may use the word, an excellent *extract* from the French Republic; and I looked silently at each, considering the great merit which individually distinguished them. Here are their names:—

"General Moreau, conqueror at Biberach, &c., and who made the superb retreat that every one knows of.

The Minister of the Interior Bénezech, whom the public voice called to the Directory.

"Boissy d'Anglas, the honour of whose re-election was contested for by forty-two departments, and who has just been again re-elected.

"Petiet, Minister of War, whom all military men honour.

"Lebrun, one of the most talented men of the council.

"Simeon, a very celebrated lawyer of the Council of Five Hundred.

"Tronçon du Coudray, of the council of the elders, one of the most eloquent supporters the unfortunate can have.

"Dumas de Saint-Fulcran, at whose house we dined; one of the most esteemed men of the military profession.

"Lemérer, of the Council of the Elders, one of the supporters of the constitution against the anarchists.

"General Sauviac, a great warrior, who composed the eulogium on Vauban.

"Pastoret, an eloquent pleader of the bold principles of the Council of Five Hundred.

"The Minister of General Police, Cochon; one of those powerful men who know best how to turn a ministerial difficulty to the advantage of the nation.

"Vaublanc, of the Council of Five Hundred; the defender of the colonies against all usurpers.

"Young Kellermann, who (wounded) brings us twenty-five flags from Bonaparte.

"General Menou, who has acquired immortal glory by refusing to fire on the citizens in Vendémiaire.

"General Dumas, of the Council of the Elders; this name requires no further praise.

"Lehoc, who was charged with our affairs in Sweden.

"Zac-Mathieu, a supporter of the constitution, as were all his friends of the Council of the Elders.

"Portalis, of the Council of the Elders, whose forcible eloquence has a hundred times overthrown the black enterprises of the enemies of the interior; and from whom is expected, the day after to-morrow, a report against the calumnies and abuses inseparable from the freedom of the press.

"Mathieu, Commissary-General of the army of General Moreau.

"Baudeau, General of Brigade, aide-de-camp of General Moreau.

"Loyel, his second aide-de-camp.

"Ramel, Colonel of the Grenadiers, who form the guard of the Legislative Corps.

"And for the last and lowest of the guests, myself, the observer, who enjoyed himself in the fulness of his soul.

The dinner has been instructive, not noisy, very agreeable;

indeed, was such as I do not recollect ever to have been at before. If you like your friend to see good company, this was excellent. Good-bye.

"CARON BEAUMARCHAIS."

It was in April, 1797, that Beaumarchais appeared at this dinner, where he calls the guests, rather singularly amalgamated, an *extract* of the Republic: four months after the 18th Fructidor, a *coup d'état* proscribed nearly half these guests. "The deputies of the people," says Gudin, "were carried away from their sacred seats, shut up in ambulatory cages, like wild beasts, crowded into ships and transported to Guiana." This republican *coup d'état* naturally cooled the republican zeal of Beaumarchais a good deal. "He acknowledged no longer," added Gudin, "either men or actions; he no longer understood the forms, or the means employed in these times, stripped of rules and principles. He invoked Reason, which had so frequently caused him to triumph. Reason was a stranger; she was, if one dared to say it, a sort of emigrant whose name rendered those suspected who called on her."

In the midst of this whirlpool of illegality and fraud, it was necessary that the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," who had become deaf, he says somewhere, as a sepulchral urn, harassed by creditors, following up insolvent debtors, and especially his great debtor, the State, which would not pay him,

should recommence afresh, at sixty-five, the labours of his whole life. It would seem that a situation so disastrous would have been sufficient to have entirely upset him: however, it was not so. Under the weight of griefs which besieged him, we see him shaking off all personal considerations, to apply his mind with indefatigable ardour to all questions of public interest, to a thousand things, literary, or otherwise; to a thousand incidents, which were all new to him. At one time, he pointed out with indignation, in the journals of the time, the incredible negligence which allowed the body of Turenne, subject to the vandalism of terror, to remain forgotten and exposed amongst the skeletons of animals at the Jardin des Plantes, and procured it the order in council of the Directory, which, five or six months afterwards, put an end to the scandal; another time he wrote either to the government or to the deputies, who, like Baudin of Ardennes, represent his ideas of moderation and law, memorials or letters upon all the subjects which form the order of the day. He chatted about literature and the theatre, with the amiable Collin d'Harleville,* or he pleaded with the Minister of the Interior for the rights of dramatic authors against the actors, and at the

* Gudin has already published Beaumarchais' letters to Collin d'Harleville; we reproduce it in Appendix, No. 27, with the answer from Beaumarchais, hitherto unpublished.

same time, he wrote to this minister a very earnest letter of recommendation in favour of an unfortunate actress, Madame Vestris. He also occupied himself with the revival of the "Mère coupable;" he enjoyed with delight his late successes at the theatre, and, to stimulate the zeal of the French comedians, addressed to them the following unpublished letter, which is rather humourous, and quite in his style of wit :—

"Germinal 14 year 5.

"My dear fellow citizens, you who represent so many beautiful things, and so well, have one mediocre thing on your stocks, from the feeble pen of your humble servant.

"About this mediocrity, you have seen, I have not shown any indiscreet haste to give "my mother" the preference; but as you have appeared to enjoy the exclusive pleasure of having her, for six months, I have been refusing her to other gallants who ask for her, from which it follows that "my mother" does not feel herself the wife of any one, which is exceedingly displeasing to women.

"My good friends, if the wedding drags on as much as the betrothal, you force me to continue to disoblige, by refusing "my mother," without any apparent motive, to those who wish to have her; for, being able to offer them only an equivocal wedding, without any publicity for them, or indeed for "my mother," no one is pleased with me. If in your clandestine loves, some fault has made you weary of her, at least pronounce a divorce. A widow, alas! without having had a husband, despised by her handsomest lovers, I will let her console herself by second-rate admirers; for "my mother" says ingenuously, that being almost as old as her son, she has no time to lose, if I wish her to be applauded. And I,

noble child that I am, I wish my dear friends to do everything that can please my mother.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

An imagination as ardent as that of Beaumarchais, could not be a stranger to the universal enthusiasm which the young conqueror of Italy then inspired. After having followed General Bonaparte in prose and verse beyond the Alps, when the latter came to Paris in December, 1797, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" addressed his friend, the minister Talleyrand, on the subject, in a letter which contains some very bad verses, but which is rather interesting, as it proves that even at this time there were persons in France who mutilated the great name of Bonaparte, as the "Moniteur" had done when printing it after Vendemiaire for the first time.

"24 Frimaire year 6.

"Citizen Minister,—When Bonaparte signed the preliminaries of peace, I put into the French Journals, which crossed the Alps, these four bad lines, whose only merit consists in their intention, which he has very nobly taken, and with great readiness:—

'Jeune *Bonaparté*, de victoire en victoire
Tu nous donnes la paix, et nos cœurs sont émus;
Mais veux-tu conquérir tous les genres de gloire?
Pense à nos prisonniers d'Olmutz.*'

"Now that he laughs at us, and conceals himself as much as he can, I beg you to show him the testimony of my displeasure:—

* An allusion to Lafayette which does honour to Beaumarchais' feeling disposition.

'BOUTADE BY AN OLD MAN WHO IS ANNOYED AT NOT HAVING SEEN HIM.

'Comme Français, je cherche une façon nouvelle
De rendre un juste hommage au grand *Bonaparté.*
Si j'étais nê dans Londres, ah! je voudrais comme elle
Que le diable l'eût emporté!'

"You know that I am the first poet in Paris, as you enter by the Porte Antoine.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

Three months later, General Mathieu Dumas, brother-in-law of the son-in-law of Beaumarchais, having introduced the latter to General Desaix, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" profited by it, to write by him direct to General Bonaparte a letter, the rough copy of which I have not been able to find amongst his papers, but which procured him this unpublished letter, in which may be already recognised under its republican familiarity, that imperial conciseness, which the ancients named *imperatoria brevitas.*

"Paris, Germinal 11 year 6, (March 1798).

"General Desaix has remitted to me, citizen, your agreeable letter of the 25th Ventôse. I thank you for it, I shall embrace with pleasure any circumstance which may present itself to make the acquaintance of the author of "La mère coupable."

"I salute you,

"BONAPARTE."

Thus, in the eyes of General Bonaparte, Beaumarchais is, above all, the author of "La Mère coupable."

Can this be looked upon as the sign of a literary preference for this drama, or of a certain political repugnance for "The Marriage of Figaro," or simply as the result of the fact that the drama of "La Mère coupable" had been recently revived? This is a question which it seems difficult to answer.*

All the letters of Beaumarchais' old age are not equally interesting, as concerns the sentiment which dictated them. Two of them, above all, caused much scandal when they were published by him in the "Journal de Paris," and the "philosopher" Gudin has not failed to reproduce them religiously: we mean those in which, when censured in reference to the publication of Voltaire's works, the author of "The

* I find, among the papers intrusted to me by Beaumarchais' family, another note from Bonaparte, when First Consul, addressed to Madame de Beaumarchais, after the death of her husband, and in answer to a petition. It is in the following terms:—"Paris, Vendemiaire year 9.—Madam, I have received your letter; I will act in your affair with all the interest which the memory of the justly-celebrated man deserves, and which you yourself inspire.—BONAPARTE." We may here rectify one of the numerous incorrect details which are found in the "Memorials of St. Helena." The author of this work makes the glorious captive say "that he had constantly repelled Beaumarchais, in spite of all his wit, *from the time of his consulate*, on account of his bad reputation and his great immorality." Besides the fact that the two letters we have just quoted are far from indicating so marked an antipathy, the Emperor would not have said that he had repelled Beaumarchais *from the time of his consulate*, as the latter died before the consulate, on the 18th May, 1799, when General Bonaparte was still in Egypt.

Marriage of Figaro," who until that time had never attacked Christianity in a direct manner,* allows himself to do so in a moment of impatience. Beaumarchais, a disciple of Voltaire, like him, was here falling into that gross error, so common for the rest in the 18th century, which consists in confounding frankness with effrontery, and in imagining that because a man has no religion himself he is authorized, and even obliged, to wound those who have, in their most sacred feelings. To propagate incredulity with the same ardour which one would exert in propagating a religious belief, is a line of conduct which, even looking at it from a sceptical point of view, resembles, if I may be allowed the comparison, that pursued by a man who, because he did not believe in general in the virtue of women, would imagine he had the right to demonstrate to every son that his mother was unworthy of his respect. There is in this matter a necessity for reserve, which all persons who are not corrupt understand of themselves. It is from such a feeling that the Arabs are found to bow down before the manifestation of a religious belief in which they do not partake. The sceptics of our day have at least this advantage over those of the eighteenth century;—the voice of conscience tells them that, all other qualities being equal, he who believes

* La Harpe himself makes this remark in the chapter of his "Cours de Littérature" which relates to Beaumarchais.

sincerely, who practises his religion without bitterness and without hatred to his neighbour, is better than he who does not believe, and ought to be, if not envied, at least respected in his faith.

We have already seen Beaumarchais, by very seriously and very properly requesting an increase in the number of masses for his wife, his daughter, his sister, and the faithful of his quarter, give the example of that kind of respect which incredulity owes to religion. Therefore, this outburst in his old age can only be explained by attributing it to a fit of irritation. Disapproved of as they were by Madame de Beaumarchais, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" would, doubtless, never have written these unfortunate letters, if his sister Julie, who was very pious, and had some influence over him, had not died a year before.*

* We should have been very glad to leave in forgetfulness two letters of Beaumarchais' of another kind, and not less blameable. Unfortunately, these letters exist, and they have already been mentioned by other writers in a manner which obliges us to say a few words about them, in order to extenuate in some degree the consequences which might be drawn from them. It seems that some public establishment in London is in the possession of some very cynical notes written by the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," written in his old age to a woman, a *résumé* of which has been sent us. These notes made part of a packet of letters which Beaumarchais' family had bought, and which they thought they had utterly destroyed; but, as it often happens in such cases, the vendor of these letters kept back a few of them, which passed from hand to hand, and were at last deposited as precious documents in the establishment we-

The result of these two letters on Voltaire and Jesus Christ, published in April, 1799, proves that notable progress was already made in the spirit of the age. One sees that the eighteenth century is

have just mentioned. If the preservers of this collection are fond of Beaumarchais' autographs, they might obtain in exchange for the vulgar and not very clever letters which they possess, some much more interesting and much more worthy of being preserved. However, as the former have been read by a certain number of curious people, we must here mention that it would be a mistake to take them as a proof that Beaumarchais, even in his old age, and in the midst of the grief which overwhelmed him, formed connections unworthy of him. The person to whom these letters are addressed, was one who was in herself little worthy of esteem, but who occupied a certain position in society, and whose connection with Beaumarchais commenced several years before the time at which these letters were written. This connection was not well kept up, but often interrupted by Beaumarchais and his family, who knew of it. After the Revolution, the lady in question became very poor; she had recourse to the purse of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," who was always generous, although himself in very embarrassed circumstances; from this resulted a renewal of an epistolary correspondence, and those deplorable *écarts de language* from an old man, whose youth had been deficient in morality, and who was encouraged to this degree of excess by a licentious woman. Besides, in order to judge rightly of all this, we must bear in mind the spirit of an age when immoral novels like Diderot's were read even in the boudoirs of high-born ladies. In our days, if one could participate in the private conversation of more than one personage of high standing, apparently virtuous, strange things might be heard; yet it is but right to add, that one would not generally go so far as to write as they would speak, and this is what constitutes the difference even in what is wrong in the two ages. The carelessness with which Beaumarchais left low things written by him, and under the signature of a name which he has rendered famous, exposed to circulation, is certainly one of the characteristic traits of his time.

drawing to a close, and that it is the eve of the signal success of the Genius of Christianity. Among the disciples of Voltaire who applauded these letters, some few refused to insert them in their journals. One very grave man, a celebrated economist, formerly member of the first constituency, Dupont de Nemours, since Councillor of State under the Restoration, and a Member of the Institute, who in 1799 edited the journal called the "Historian," wrote the following unpublished letter on this subject to Beaumarchais, in which we may see the anti-religious prejudice as ardent in him as in the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," but obliged, however, to submit to the ascendancy of religious re-action.

"15 Germinal year 7 (April, 1799).

"With much pleasure, my dear philosopher, I have read your little article on Voltaire and Jesus Christ; it is, like all your other works, written with energy and deep thought; but my readers have not yet attained this eminence; we must lead them to it by degrees, and think ourselves fortunate if they do so by next year.

"The Jacobinical persecutions have driven back the light. Their intolerance has made Christians again of people who were not even Deists: such is the revolt of liberty against all tyranny.

"You do not wish me to believe what is absurd, and therefore you threaten me with the dungeon or the guillotine. Well! I will say that I believe it. And after having repeated it several times from hardihood, many people begin to believe it from habit.

"These demi-Christians are besides useful and respectable,

because they are enemies to our executioners, and natural allies to liberty, safety, and propriety.

"It is for us, then, to deal carefully with prejudices which cannot be lasting, and which will cease with the persecution which gave them birth.

"I embrace you with tenderness, and thank you sincerely for the interest you kindly take in the "Historian," and claim for it your assistance, limiting your zeal, alia aux octaves moyennes, within due bounds. We are thought bold; nous n'allons pas à moitié du clavier, but that will come.

"DUPONT DE NEMOURS."

I think that this letter of Dupont de Nemours gives a good idea of the workings of minds after the terrible shock of the Revolution. Here is another journalist, Corancez, who accepts the article on Voltaire and Jesus Christ; but it is at the same time acknowledged, that by doing so he commits a bold action:—

"15 Germinal year 7.

"I will insert your letter about the last words of Voltaire, citizen, because I think it good, because it is from you, and because I am no hypocrite. I make no accusations, but, in my opinion, to refuse it would be either an act of Catholicism, or hypocrisy.*

"CORANCEZ."

To complete the picture of the state of minds on religious questions in 1799, we must add to what

* This is the confusion between frankness and effrontery, of which we lately spoke.

precedes, a passage on the same subject from an unpublished letter of La Harpe, who was recently converted, a letter which was written to Madame de Beaumarchais in December, 1799, six months after the death of her husband, a fragment of which we quoted at the beginning of this work :—

"I should have liked," writes La Harpe, "to have been able to bear him (Beaumarchais) this testimony, which is not the least honourable, that he was of the number of men of talent who never attacked religion. I would have borne it him the more willingly, as I regret that I cannot do so to myself; I am deprived of this pleasure by the letter which he wrote I think about a fortnight before that sudden and unforeseen death which bore him from you. I am at least sure that you will not think badly of me for disapproving of it. This *écart* from a man, otherwise so enlightened, is the consequence of the revolutionary contagion, and I have no right to be severe on this kind of error."

This tone of modesty and charity, which seems sincere, was rare enough in La Harpe for us to take pleasure in signalising it. The celebrated critic gives us himself with perfect justice the most just opinion which can be given of this error of Beaumarchais, whose mind must have been sometimes worried and troubled by the vexations and annoyances which harassed him in his latter days.

In order to leave no unfavourable impression on the reader, we must show the same man who edited this improper letter on Jesus Christ, about the same

time addressing the following lines to an old sinner, Morande, which were written *dans l'abandon de l'amitié*, the sincerity of which should not therefore be doubted, and which show that if the religious sentiment in him was not complete, it was not, perhaps, so extinct as in many other celebrated personages of the eighteenth century. Beaumarchais writes:—

"I do not like your considering the dissolution of the body in your philosophical reflections as the fate which is exclusively destined for us: this body is not us; it will doubtless perish, but the Maker of such a splendid edifice would have made a work unworthy his power if he reserved nothing of that great faculty which he has allowed to reach to a knowledge of himself. My brother, my friend, my Gudin, often converses with me about this uncertain future, and our conclusion is always: Let us at least deserve that it may be good; if it be so, we shall have made an excellent calculation; if we are to be mistaken in such a consoling view, this reflection on ourselves, preparing us for an irreproachable life, has very great comfort."

By the side of this we like to see the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" accused in 1798 by his friend Talleyrand, who was then Minister of Foreign Affairs, of being the dupe of every one, and he bore this reproach very well:—

"The day before yesterday," he writes, "I was smiling at the great praise you lavished on me, by saying that I should be the dupe of every one. To be duped by all those one has obliged, from the sceptre to the shepherd's crook, is to be a

victim and not a dupe. If I could have kept all that ungrateful baseness has taken from me, I would not at such a price have acted otherwise. This is my creed. What I lose affects me but little: that which affects the glory and happiness of my country exhausts all my sensibilities. When we commit a fault, I feel the anger of a child, and without being *good*, or doing *anything*, I repair every night, in purpose at least, the follies and errors of each day. This is what my friend calls being a dupe, as every one here, they say, thinks only of himself. What an abominable country if this were true of all! but I am sure, and very sure of the contrary. When will you see my little work, 'Commerce de Dupe?'* It will not displease you; you will find something shewn from the past, present, and future—the *future*, all that remains to us! While speaking of the two others, they are already far, far away.

"Hail imperishable attachment,

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

This ardour of sensibility and patriotic disinterestedness must have been very sincere, as Beaumarchais did not fear to display it to so tortuous a man as Talleyrand. He certainly could not have intended to make a dupe of him. This was part of his character, which he could well support against the

* It is a Memorial in favour of peace with the United States; our diplomatic relations with this young Republic had just been disturbed. Beaumarchais desired to be sent on an embassy to America, and foreseeing that his deafness would be objected to, he refuted the objection beforehand by the following argument, which if not very solid is at least very ingenious:—"My bad hearing," he wrote, "would not be an obstacle; it is not necessary to speak low to the delegates of a powerful Republic when treating of its interests. The mystery used by royal negotiators is beneath our high diplomacy."

railleries of the subtle minister. And, indeed, nothing was more real than the perpetual solicitude of Beaumarchais for what did not concern him. No one could imagine what a quantity of paper he soiled in his old age when tormented by personal cares, for the applicants or inventors;* they begged for his assistance, erroneously believing him to be possessed of great influence, about all the political, diplomatic, or commercial questions, which interested France.

In the midst of these varied pre-occupations, and despite the hours of despondency in which Beaumarchais thought himself irretrievably ruined, his natural gaiety,† and quickness of repartee never forsook

* Thus, one of the last works of his old age is a memorial to the Minister of the Interior, François de Neufchâteau, in behalf of a man who thought he had discovered the art of directing ærostats. See this correspondence with the Minister in the Appendix, No. 28. On another occasion, when Madame Scherer, the wife of the Minister of War, came to see his garden, Beaumarchais took advantage of the opportunity to present to her a petition, very gallantly worded, in favour of an old soldier.

† We have already quoted Beaumarchais' singular couplets in reply to the couplets of the dying Julie; why should we not now quote, to complete the portrait of this ever-varying physiognomy, the following unpublished song? Although of a light character, it is rather grotesque and amusing than indecent. Beaumarchais wrote these couplets when he was a very old man, as is shown by the heaviness of the handwriting. They must date, then, from the latter days of his life. We may say of the composition what he says of the song of his sister Julie—it is that of the dying swan.

him, not even in his latter days. When opulent, we have seen that he was a prey to borrowers and beggars, who were often deficient in politeness; his old age and poverty did not exempt him from this kind of unpleasantness: people persisted in thinking him rich. While his house and furniture were being

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ROMANCE, TO BE SUNG SLOWLY, AND WITH GREAT FEELING.

Devant les dames, on la chante en *i*;
Devant les filles, on la chante en *ou*.

Sur l'air: *O gué lan la landerirette,*
O gué lan la landerira.

1er COUPLET.

Grave et doux. Au fond d'un verger Climène
Attendait le beau Licas;
Sa bouche exprimait à peine,
Mais son cœur disait tout bas.

Vite et fort. *Qué bigre est çà?* landerirette,
Qué bigre est çà? landerira.

2e COUPLET.

Grave et doux. Dans son ardeur inquiète,
Mille fois elle appela;
Mais l'écho, qui tout répète,
Ne redit que ces mots-là:

Vite et fort. *Qué bigre est çà?* landerirette,
Qué bigre est çà? landerira.

3e COUPLET.

Grave et doux. Le berger entend sa plainte,
Il accourt entre ses bras:
"Ta douleur s'est peu contrainte,
"Car j'entendais de là-bas:

Vite et fort. "*Qué bigre est çà?* landerirette,
"*Qué bigre est çà?* landerira."

seized by his creditors, he was often obliged to shut his door against the multitude of borrowers who continued to besiege it, and he received strange notes in the following style :—

"Fructidor 9 (August 26, 1797.)

"Sir,—I cannot refrain from expressing my surprise at the impudence in a man of your extraction, leaving a military man of rank at a porter's lodge, and sending him a verbal answer through a servant. You will pretend not to have received this.—I expect as much.

"Nevertheless, I never forget an insult; and I am offended at the manner in which you receive well-bred persons. *Satis.*

"C. Dubois Dunilac,
"Commissary of War, Rue Traversière,
Saint Honoré, No. 77."

This, thought old Beaumarchais, is a singular way of begging at doors! He certainly might have refrained from answering it; but as it seemed rather strange to him to be reproached with his birth, in the heat of the Republic, by a beggar, with a name ending in *ac*, who styled himself "Commissary of War," he

* "Ce 9 Fructidor an v (26 août 1797).

"Monsieur,—Je ne puis me dispenser de vous témoigner ma surprise de l'impudence d'un homme de votre extraction qui se permet de laisser chez un portier un militaire en grade, et qui lui fait *réponce* verbale par l'organe d'un domestique. Vous ne répondrez pas; vous *faindrez* n'avoir pas reçu la présente, je m'y attends.

"*Néansmoins* je n'oublie *jammais* un outrage, et je suis *offencé* de votre façon de recevoir des personnes honnêtes. *Satis.*

"C. Dubois Dunilac,
"Commissaire des guerres, rue Traversière-Saint-Honoré, no 77."

did not resist his inclination to write a few words to this pretended gentleman. This is his answer :—

"Paris, Fructidor 10 year 5 (Aug. 27, 1797.)

"The want of propriety shown in your letter, Citizen or Sir, whichever you prefer, ought doubtless, as you presumed, to prevent me from answering it; but if I owe nothing to you, I owe it to myself, to check the impertinence of a man who possesses so little delicacy. I have given orders that no one shall be allowed to enter my house but those who are known, in order to escape all the stratagems of which thousands of swindlers, and people who are sometimes worse, make use in these troubled times, in order to obtain admittance into different houses. This measure, to insure general safety, cannot be offensive to you, whom I do not know.

"So, Sir, you can boast of a descent which you think entitles you to wound the feelings of peaceable citizens, to whom you write about theirs. I thought all these miseries were deeply buried with the *ancien régime;* but I see I was right when I said at the theatre, as an adage for every age, 'Folly and vanity are inseparable companions.'

"Believe me, when a man has the honour of being employed, without any danger, in the brave armies of the Republic, he may be proud of acquitting himself of his office; but the poor vanity of noble birth is, in your profession, as well as in all others, a puerility unworthy of a sensible man.

"Accept my compliments in return for your invectives. I am not at all angry. Your parents did not confide the care of your education to me. Perhaps you are still young, and I am sixty-five years of age. What can we have in common, unless it be *cette leçon qui vaut bien un fromage sans doute,* as good La Fontaine says; and I offer it you *gratis,* which answers to the word '*satis,*' with which your letter concludes. A little Latin does not harm, when one only writes in order to shine.

"Caron Beaumarchais,
"Citizen of France."

One would hardly imagine how the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was occupied in his latter days when besieged by *huissiers*. One might guess a thousand times. He edited a Memorial to the Directory on the assassination of the French plenipotentiaries, committed by some Austrian hussars, April 28, 1799, near Rastadt, the news of which had just arrived, and excited a burst of horror and surprise in France. Beaumarchais' Memorial began in the following manner:—

BEAUMARCHAIS TO CITIZEN TREILHARD.

"Citizen Director,—In the ordinary course of political events, I consider it would be more than indiscreet on my part to express my opinion, whatever it might be, to you, in the hope of influencing your determination; but the unheard-of crime, the atrocious accident of which the telegraph has just informed us, is of such great importance, that I consider I am fulfilling my duty as a good citizen, by telling you in a few words what I think of it."

The author of this Memorial then gives his opinion as to the position France ought to take with regard to the crime; not to be precipitate in taking revenge, but to maintain a calm and imposing majesty. After having developed the motives of his opinion he continues in these words:—

"If I had the honour to be one of the five principal magistrates of the Republic, I should vote for a general mourning on account of the deadly wound received by the nation, through its plenipotentiaries at Rastadt. Publish a proclamation identifying France with the execrable insults, which her three delegates have received *in her name*. . . . .

"Either I am mistaken in my country, or I think that you ought to expect from such a noble mode of acting a *levée en masse* of the nation,

"Salut, respect, and devotion,

"CARON BEAUMARCHAIS."

A few days after he had written this Memorial, on the morning of the 18th May, 1799, Beaumarchais, who the previous evening had been very gay with his family and a few friends, was found dead in his bed, having had a violent fit of apoplexy, at the age of sixty-seven years and three months.

It seems that on account of a few words, which were more or less authentic, attributed to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," in a conversation with a friend who is not named, and the subject of which was the best means of killing one's self by chemical means without pain, the opinion that he had poisoned himself with opium, found some partisans. Indeed, eight or ten days after his decease, a friend of the family wrote to Madame de Beaumarchais, that he had met some one who had *gravely uttered this impertinence.* This report having been revived by several writers * in the present day, we must prove that it is altogether without foundation.

* Esménard, in his article "Beaumarchais" in the "Biographie Universelle," expresses a suspicion of this kind. It is also found revived, on the authority of Beuchot, by one of our most esteemed literati, M. Ravenel, in the notice which precedes his little 18mo edition of Beaumarchais. M. Sainte-Beuve declares that he expe-

First of all, we have before us the certificate of the surgeon Lasalle, who was called in to give a certificate of the death. This certificate is dated the very day of the death, Floréal 29 year 7, and declares that the citizen Beaumarchais died "of sanguine apoplexy, and of no other illness." To this testimony we must join that of the son-in-law of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," M. Delarue, who, when informed by us of the persevering manner in which this report was circulated, and of which he was ignorant, wrote to us, some years since, the following letter:—

"Villepinte, par Livry (Seine-et-Oise),
"October 7, 1849.

"Sir,—I have just learnt with painful astonishment the rumours which have been circulated about the last moments of Beaumarchais, my father-in-law. The lying assertion as

riences no difficulty in admitting the apoplexy, "reserving to himself at the utmost," he says, "a slight doubt." Finally, in a remarkable essay on Népomucène Lemercier, published by M. Charles Labitte, in which this author seems also inclined, after Lemercier himself, to entertain the opinion that Beaumarchais had committed suicide. It is a complete error; but in refuting this error I will profit by the occasion to pay a passing homage to the memory of the young, witty, and learned Charles Labitte, so prematurely snatched from literature, which he cultivated with such remarkable talent and such noble ardour. I ought to add here, that the brother of M. Charles Labitte gave me some notes which the latter had collected, with a view of writing a notice of Beaumarchais; and although I have not made much use of these notes, in the midst of the mass of materials furnished to me by the family of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," they have, nevertheless, furnished me with some useful hints.

to his suicide, which has been reproduced by serious writers, obliges me to repel, with all the indignation it merits, a fable at which the family and friends of Beaumarchais would have been much hurt if they had known it, if it had been circulated sooner.

"Beaumarchais, after passing with his family a most lively evening, during which his wit had never been more free or more brilliant, was struck with apoplexy. His valet, on coming into his room in the morning, found him in the same position in which he had left him when he put him to bed, with a calm face, and apparently asleep. I was informed of it by the cries of despair uttered by the valet. I hurried to my father-in-law's room, when I ascertained that he had suffered a sudden and tranquil death; my only subsequent care was to save his daughter, who really worshipped her father, the anguish of hearing news which might have been fatal to her if it had been communicated to her without preparation. This, Sir, is the exact truth.

"DELARUE."

The narrative of Beaumarchais' death given by Gudin in his manuscript, corresponds perfectly with that of M. Delarue. Let us add, in order to do away with all suspicion of planned reticence on the subject, between the relations and friends of the defunct, that in the most private family letters there is no trace of such an opinion; Gudin, for instance, in his letters to Madame de Beaumarchais, makes frequent allusions to the death of his friend, always wishing, like him, for a "sudden and tranquil death;" while Madame de Beaumarchais writes on her side: "He has left this world without knowing it, as he entered

it." Whence we must conclude that if Beaumarchais committed suicide, this suicide was only known to strangers, and that the surgeon who wrote the certificate of his death, and his own family, were completely ignorant of it, which is certainly not very probable. We must, moreover, remark that Beaumarchais in his old age presented the appearance of a man "of a full and sanguine habit." These characteristics of his constitution are indicated in the last passport, which the minister of France at Hamburg gave him, when he was returning to his native land; and he calls himself, in some verses of the same period:

"Un bon vieillard grand, gris, gros, gras."

Now, the annoyance, agitation, and impatience caused by the destruction of his fortune, which have been brought forward to explain his asserted suicide, when we take them in connection with his temperament, point much more naturally to apoplexy. Finally, this opinion as to his suicide, founded altogether upon heedless words, which an *anonymous* witness heard Beaumarchais utter when speaking of poisons which give no pain—this opinion as to his suicide is radically incompatible with the situation and known disposition of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." He adored his only daughter, and was adored by her; he alone appeared capable, and

thought himself capable, of extricating his great fortune from the chaos into which it had been thrown. Is it admissible that he could have thought of a voluntary leaving of this heavy burden on the shoulders of his daughter and her young husband, who was then quite inexperienced in affairs of the world?

It is also known that one of the distinctive points in Beaumarchais' character was his obstinate perseverance; he was combating, as we have said, at the time of his death, the unjust decision of a final commission, which proposed to the Minister of Finance to take from him 997,000 francs, granted by a preceding commission, and to make him a debtor to the State for the sum of 500,000 francs. *Ten days* before dying, Floréal 18 year 7, he wrote on this subject to the minister Talleyrand, his friend, the following lines: "It is against this murderous commission, *which I shall deal with apart,* it is against their unjust manner of acting towards me, that I now appear before the Minister of Finance; I at once place my just claims before him in a light as clear as the sun, and this is the time for you to speak in my favour." Was this a time, it being established that at his death the Minister of Finance had not yet come to any determination, was this a time—when a violent and decisive struggle was pending, for Beaumarchais to think of giving up the contest by com-

mitting suicide? Evidently not. It is certain, then, that this story of his suicide, already disproved by the most authentic documents and personal testimony, is not less at variance with all probability; it rests, then, upon no foundation, and ought to be for ever dismissed.

In one of the darkest walks of his garden, Beaumarchais had arranged a group of trees, which were destined to shade his tomb. "There," says Gudin, "his son-in-law, his relations, his friends, and some men of letters who loved him, performed the last duties towards him, and Collin d'Harleville pronounced a speech, which I had composed on the first outburst of my grief, but which I was not in a fit state to deliver." Beneath this funereal clump, after so stormy a life, Beaumarchais doubtless hoped to be able to say at last: "*Tandem quiesco.*" This was again an illusion; this clump is now a street, and the coffin which it protected has had to be removed to one of those great cemeteries, which will also one day become streets and public places.

On the death of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," his brilliant fortune seemed completely destroyed. He left to his heirs plenty of debts and law-suits. However, after a few years, through fortunate circumstances and good administration, the state of his affairs became notably improved. I find, indeed, in a report of the cashier Gudin's, ad-

dressed to the daughter of his old patron, that his fortune, although considerably diminished, amounted in 1809 to nearly a million. Madame Delarue, then, was somewhat exaggerating the meaning of words, when, in a dialogue which we have given above, she said to the Emperor: "Sire, the Revolution has ruined us, or nearly so." As the opinion that Beaumarchais was completely ruined, has been expressed in a good many works, we have thought it right to correct it.

This work would not be complete unless we consecrated some lines specially to the wife and daughter of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." The reader can have formed no idea of the former, except from some very short quotations which we have given. Her correspondence evinces an intellect of the most distinguished kind: her friends call her "a new Sévigné;" and this is not a mere compliment. We will quote one of her letters only, in order to give some idea of her style of thought; it is addressed to a lady who translated "Sappho:"—

"My dear friend,—I have read 'Sappho' with care, because it is translated by you. Sapphics might please me if I could read them in the maternal language. As for the adventures of this young Greek, they do not interest me; my feminine pride would even be much wounded if I did not see Venus behind the curtain, and *Venus tout entière à sa proie attachée;* it is exactly this idea of fate which destroys all the interest. It required the splendid talent and inexhaustible

resources of our Racine to inspire his audience with interest in favour of 'Phédre;' the intervention of the gods destroys all illusion; directly you are no longer free to act, or directly you only act from an exterior and invincible impulse, the charm no longer exists.

"Sappho falls in love with a handsome Athlete! . . . . . Well and good, *Vous rougirez, mais vous prendrez Alcide.* The young man is never anything more than polite with her, he never encourages her; from the beginning he relates the signal favours he has received from Venus (through what caprice of the goddess we have yet to learn); he speaks of his love, of his approaching union with the most beautiful girl in Greece; he wishes happiness to Sappho (which is a different thing from promising it to her); finally, he does not excite in her the slightest hope, and nevertheless, Sappho's passion becomes so extreme, that, despising all that becomes her sex, and stifling all natural sentiments, she flies from the paternal home to run like a madwoman after this handsome but unimpressionable man. After such extravagant conduct, she is attacked with delirium; she is tormented with superstitious ideas; and, to deliver herself from her grief, and put an end to her life, she takes the fatal leap. You will allow, my dear, that if Venus was not the machinist of such an adventure, it would be considered monstrous and indecent; 'Sappho,' in the opinion of sound minds, would be pronounced mad, or without shame, and her shameful weakness would be a proscribed subject; but Venus makes it all pass.

"As to the style, it is not sufficiently naturalised, it exhibits foreign and constrained forms of construction—a redundance of the same images, the same thoughts, and the same expressions, which fatigues the imagination. Taking it altogether, the action is not sufficiently rapid, and the metaphors are not always happy. That is what I see in 'Sappho,' and how it has affected me. If you were the author, instead of being the translator, I should not have ventured upon this

criticism—I should have confined myself to a few observations. These young ladies of Greece were generally somewhat dissolute; witness those of Lesbos, or those who on certain days waited on the steps of the temple; but the one who ran after the gentleman would have been a hundred times more contemptible if she had acted from her own impulse. Is it not so, Thérèse?" *

Some days after the death of her husband, Madame de Beaumarchais wrote the following lines about him:—

"Our loss is irreparable. The companion of twenty-five years of my life has disappeared, and leaves me nothing but useless regrets, a fearful solitude, and *souvenirs* which nothing can efface. . . . . He forgave with good grace, and willingly forgot injuries and ill-nature. He was a good father, a zealous and useful friend, and the natural defender of all absent persons who were attacked before him. Superior to little jealousies, so common among men of letters, he advised and encouraged them all, and served them both with his purse and with his counsels. In the eyes of philosophy, his end must be looked upon as a favour; he escaped from this laborious life, or rather, it escaped from him, without contest, without grief, without any of the torture which would have been caused by the fearful separation from all who were dear to him. He quitted life without knowing it, as he entered it."

Beaumarchais' widow died in 1816, preserving the grace and freshness of her wit to the last, although suffering from painful infirmities.

* The author of this translation of "Sappho" was a god-daughter of Madame de Beaumarchais, Madame Thérèse Dujard.

The daughter of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," Madame Delarue, has left, in the hearts of all who knew her, the remembrance of a person who was charming from her goodness, animation, and wit; loving the arts, and cultivating them with ardour, an excellent musician, a woman of the world, and at the same time a perfect mother of a family. Her style is characterised by free, lively, piquant forms of expression, which recall, to a great extent, the manner of her father. Thus, after gaining in 1818 a long law-suit relative to the valuation of her beautiful house, she relates her triumph in the following terms:—

"After twelve years of injustice, three or four revisions, as many valuations, baseness and cunning on one part, blundering and incapacity on the other, good faith and cheating, patience and impatience on a third; after a most desperate vacillation, after everything has been said, resaid, and unsaid; after a year, or even two, of parleying, four months of skirmishing, six weeks of attacks point blank, two attempts at assault, without counting the minings, counterminings, and reconnoitrings, (I understand by reconnoitrings, the taking notes of the important points in the pleadings on each side by the short-hand writers), after a brisk sortie on the part of the besieged, &c., we at last gain the victory, and here are the stipulations of the treaty."

In a packet of letters from Madame Delarue, addressed to two of her best friends, to the noble widow of the illustrious General Hoche, and to her daughter, Madame la Comtesse des Roys, who kindly

communicated them to me, I find some notes written with a pen, as rapid as thought, and always exhibiting, with a shade of feminine grace, the *verve* and enthusiasm of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." Such, for example, as the following, written at the commencement of 1831, after the news of a splendid victory of the Poles:—

"Well, our Poles and their victories! three decisive battles! from eight to ten thousand Russian prisoners! The enemy's army completely routed. Heaven grant there be nothing to strike off in all these wonders. What an heroic nation! You have heard this news without doubt? I received it yesterday evening from General M. at the Italian Opera, and it threw me into transports of delight, which were afterwards diverted to Lablache and Madame Malibran. Figaro and Rosina were admirable; the other characters were also perfectly played. In the opinion of the enthusiasts at this representation, never had any other been given with more gaiety, *verve*, *ensemble*, besides the other qualities which throw us into reverie and ecstacy."

This enthusiasm for the Poles, united with enthusiasm for music, and for music which recalls the paternal glory—all this combination is, I think, very becoming in Beaumarchais' daughter. Madame Eugénie Delarue died in June 1832.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

In terminating this long biographical and historical study, I should wish to attempt to draw a general conclusion from it. The attitude of a conscientious reporter, which I have endeavoured to preserve throughout the course of this work, permits me perhaps now to offer, as the testimony of an impartial man who has studied the subject, my opinion on the character and life of Beaumarchais.

It is evident—and this is a fact which can neither be suppressed nor contested—it is evident that among the celebrated men of the eighteenth century, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" is one of those who has not enjoyed a consideration equal to their celebrity. His character was often the object of attacks and calumnies of the most injurious nature. He seeks to explain the fact himself in an unpublished document; we will let him speak for himself:—

"With gaiety, and even *bonhommie*, I have had enemies without number, and have nevertheless never crossed, or

even taken the path of another person. By dint of reasoning with myself I have discovered the cause of so much hostility; in fact, it is natural enough.

"From the period of my thoughtless youth I have played every instrument, but I belonged to no body of musicians; the professors of the art detested me.

"I have invented some good machines; but I did not belong to the body of engineers, and they spoke ill of me.

"I composed verses, songs; but who would recognise me as a poet? I was the son of a watchmaker.

"Not caring about the game of *loto*, I wrote some pieces for the stage, but people said: 'What is he interfering with? he is not an author, for he has immense speculations, and enterprises without number.'

"Unable to meet with any one who would undertake my defence, I printed long Memorials, in order to gain actions which had been brought against me, and which may be called atrocious; but people said: 'You see very well that these are not like those our advocates produce; he does not tire you to death; will such a man be allowed to prove without us that he is in the right? *Inde iræ.*

"I have treated with ministers on the subject of great points of reform of which our finances were in need; but people said: 'What is he interfering in? this man is not a financier.'

"Struggling against all the powers, I have raised the art of printing in France by my superb editions of Voltaire—the enterprise having been regarded as beyond the capabilities of one individual; but I was not a printer, and they said the devil about me. I had constructed at the same time the first establishments of three or four paper factories without being a manufacturer; I had the manufacturers and dealers for my adversaries.

"I have traded in the four quarters of the globe; but I

was not a regular merchant. I had forty ships at sea at one time; but I was not a ship-owner, and I was calumniated in all our sea-ports.

"A ship of war of fifty two guns belonging to me had the honour of fighting in line with those of his Majesty at the taking of Grenada. Notwithstanding the pride of the navy, they gave the cross to the captain of my vessel, and military rewards to my other officers, and what I, who was looked upon as an intruder, gained, was the loss of my flotilla, which this vessel was convoying.

"And nevertheless, of all Frenchmen, whoever they may be, I am the one who has done the most for the liberty of America, the begetter of our own; for I was the only person who dared to form the plan and commence its execution, in spite of England, Spain, and even France; but I did not belong to the class of negotiators, and I was a stranger in the bureaus of the ministers. *Inde iræ.*

"Weary of seeing our uniform habitations, and our gardens without poetry, I built a house which is spoken of; but I did not belong to the arts. *Inde iræ.*

"What was I, then? I was nothing but myself, and myself I have remained, free in the midst of fetters, calm in the greatest of dangers, making head against all storms, directing speculations with one hand, and war with the other; as lazy as an ass, and always working; the object of a thousand calumnies, but happy in my home, having never belonged to any coterie, either literary, or political, or mystical; having never paid court to any one, and yet repelled by all."

There is certainly some truth in the explanation which Beaumarchais gives of the numerous enmities of which he was the object. It may even be added, that the astonishing diversity of his aptitudes contri-

buted also to prevent him rising in each direction to the height he would not have failed to attain if his efforts had been of a less divergent nature. Follow him at the theatre, or in the midst of his industrial operations and political negotiations; it will be seen that the most happy faculties lose by being thus divided between too many different ends, and how much incompleteness a want of unity in the tendency can throw in the most brilliant career. Endowed with the dramatic genius, Beaumarchais produced works which will remain on the stage, for they are distinguished by originality, movement, and life—every possible quality except correctness, and that something exquisite and finished, which the exclusive love of art spreads over the compositions of the great masters. The author of "The Barber of Seville" and "The Marriage of Figaro" never gave himself the time to diminish his defects for the benefit of his merits. We cannot find in him that ascending progression which conducts Molière from "The Etourdi" to "The Ecole des Femmes," from "The Ecole des Femmes" to "The Misanthrope." If from the domain of letters we pass to his business life, we find Beaumarchais, born with a talent for great industrial and commercial combinations, introducing into vast enterprises which evince rare intelligence, the imprudence, the generosity of the artist, or rashness of a

more or less patriotic origin, all of which does him honour, but which, under the influence of difficult circumstances, prevent him from establishing a solid fortune, and condemn him to die, after gaining several millions, without knowing exactly whether he will leave anything after him—finally, very capable of taking an honourable and important part in the government of society, the agent of Louis XVI. and of the minister Vergennes, shows even in political missions an adventurous levity which contributes to prevent him being looked upon in a serious light, and from rising above the region of secret diplomacy.

This too great diversity of aptitudes does not, however, suffice to explain the species of detraction Beaumarchais experienced during all his life. This detraction, the effect of which has been perpetuated to the present day, requires indeed another explanation. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" had almost always to struggle against a merit and a defect of his century. The defect of his century was that it still allowed a very unjust share to the rights of intelligence, so that a man, remarkably gifted as he was, found himself incessantly cramped in his flight because he was the son of a watchmaker, and not being able to attain directly to an elevated position, found himself constrained to exhibit, sometimes in obscure and mean offices, an activity and capacity

which at other times would have led him directly to dignities and honours. By the side of this defect of the eighteenth century, we find a quality equally adverse to Beaumarchais. In his time, although the love of gain had already made much progress, people had not then the respect they have now for any one who has contrived to gain money; far from admitting, as in the present day, previous to all examination, that every man who has become rich merits consideration from that fact alone, unless the means employed by him be marked by too notorious a dishonesty, they started from the opposite idea; and seeing a man issue from poverty and become rapidly rich, they felt inclined, from that fact alone, without any further examination, to mistrust him; if to aptitude for commerce he united literary talents, they mistrusted him still more; and, finally, if he had any pretensions to playing a part in political affairs, the official world liked to set a bar across his passage. This was, doubtless, unjust; but it proceeded from a delicate sentiment which refused to make the social importance of persons subservient to the question of money. The prejudices of birth appeared still less deceitful than those of money, which have replaced them in the present day. The latter is perhaps the more certain as regards intelligence, for it supposes, generally with some justice, that it must be possessed by a man who has contrived to make his fortune; but

it may be doubted whether it is more so as regards morality. The number of individuals enriched by trade or commerce, who attain a high political and moral position, such as Necker, for instance, was still very much restricted in the eighteenth century; to attain a position of this kind it was necessary to have obtained a reputation for virtue, pushed even to austerity.

The plebeian origin, and the career, at once industrial and literary, of Beaumarchais, were then in the eighteenth century, a permanent obstacle to his social standing, and when this obstacle had been destroyed by the Revolution, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was already too old to enter into the new movement of men and things. To us the mixture of the artist and the merchant is not the most interesting side of this physiognomy; but is our century one that has the right to make any difficulty upon this point? Is our century, in which stock-jobbing, and generally all kinds of speculation which depend upon the ruin of others, are practised openly and publicly, by persons who in many cases enjoy a great consideration—is our century one which has a right to refuse consideration to Beaumarchais because he liked to gain money without ever speculating on the ruin of any one, and almost always associating his enterprises with great public interests? The only act of his commercial life which has been found capable of

furnishing some pretext for suspicion is the affair of the three millions given by France and Spain to assist him in furnishing the American supplies. I have said all the truth on this point; it is evident to me that the subvention granted to Beaumarchais was compensated for, and more than that, by the enormous losses he had experienced even before the United States refused to fulfil their engagements, and still more so afterwards.

This question being cleared up, are there, at the epoch at which we live, many speculators who could permit an observer, with some curiosity, to search through all their papers with the certainty that nothing would be found in them more obscure than what I have found in the papers of Beaumarchais?

Do we mean by that, that a person of so active and adventurous a disposition as the one whose life we have just related, offers no points for criticism? Certainly not. A man does not conduct at the same time so large a number of such different enterprises without contracting certain habits of suppleness in his relations with those who may serve or injure him, a certain facility in his appreciation of good and evil, a certain inclination to maintain indifferently the pro and the con, according to the interest of the moment. That these different characteristics of the "man of business" can be recognised more or less in Beaumarchais, we

should in vain attempt to deny; the true picture we have just traced would bear witness against us. But if we are among those to whom such an existence inspires more curiosity than admiration, it appears to us incontestable that Beaumarchais is one of those men who gain the most by being seen close by, and that he is infinitely better than his reputation. His public life itself, if we only suppose it removed to another time, and disengaged from the shackles which prevent its development on a larger stage, with greater means of action, assumes a different physiognomy. The brilliant pleader, who fights with every kind of arms against a host of enemies, and contributes indirectly to overturn the Maupeou Parliament, becomes an eloquent orator, who nobly defends the cause he has embraced; the political agent, whose sagacity foresees the future in store for the colonies of America, and who exercises in the State, without profit to his glory, an incontestable influence on one of the most important affairs in the world, becomes a statesman, who plays a great part and leaves a brilliant name; the ingenious and daring speculator, consulted in secret, and almost always without result, by the ministers, becomes an eminent financier, who plans great measures, and operates useful reforms in the administration of his country. In a word, let Beaumarchais be permitted to be all he is capable of being, and instantly the individual becomes trans-

formed; everything in his life which resembles more or less intrigue, becomes talent, and how many great statesmen accepted as such, we find in whom it would be somewhat difficult to say exactly how much was owing to talent, and how much to intrigue.* If now we leave aside the relations of Beaumarchais with a society which, by keeping him at a distance, forces him to indirect means—if we judge him from that other part of his existence which has also its value as a criterion of the disposition, I mean in private life—it is impossible not to be struck with the excellent qualities which distinguish him. For a man to be kind to his family, is not precisely a rare virtue, although many men, in appearance infinitely more austere than Beaumarchais, dispense with it; but here, as in all things, there are shades which give value to the most ordinary qualities. Do we see many persons even among those who are disposed to

* This idea, that in Beaumarchais there was the stuff of a man very superior to the part in which circumstances placed him, appears to have struck one of the most original and sagacious minds of England, the historian Carlyle. At the period when our work was appearing, for the first time, in the "Revue des Deux Mondes," Mr. Carlyle addressed to one of our collaborators on the Review, M. Montégut, a letter, in which, after speaking of the interest with which he read the articles, and the new ideas he derived from them about a person who was far too much depreciated during his life, he concluded by saying: "Beaumarchais was, after all, a fine and brilliant specimen of man, and in his way a brilliant specimen of the French genius."

criticise the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" with the greatest severity, who, like him, make it their duty, and that even when personally in a position of great difficulty, not only to supply all the wants of their nearest relatives, but also to pension nephews and portion nieces? We have, for our part, known a sufficiently large number of virtuous millionaires, who, in all security of conscience, allowed their collateral relations to die of hunger.

The kindness of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" did not extend alone to those who surrounded him; the reader has been able to appreciate, by more than one example, the facility, and at the same time the delicacy, with which he loved to assist whoever appeared to him worthy of interest. Gudin asserts that the inventory made after his death, offered, independently of sums given without any traces of them remaining, more than 900,000 francs of acknowledgments for sums lent to unfortunate men of all classes, artisans, artists, men of letters, and men of rank, with a complete absence of security for the repayment. Beaumarchais had virulent enemies; but one important point to notice is, that all who attacked him furiously knew him very little, or did not know him at all, while all those who lived on terms of intimacy with him, loved him with ardour. All those writers who, having known him during his life, and have spoken of him after his death, have

done so with affection and esteem. Two men of such different minds as La Harpe and Arnault agree, in reference to him, in expressing the same sympathy; and I have not found, throughout his long career, a single example of a man who, after having been his intimate friend, became his enemy. I found on the contrary, in his papers, evidence of attachments which are not common; I have found instances of friendship commencing with his youth, when he was a simple watchmaker, or controller of the king's household, which continued for thirty or forty years without ever varying or changing, but which, on the contrary, increased constantly in intensity, and exhibited the most lively and disinterested affection. These are not friends who have need of him, they are independent friends who love him for himself, who know his faults, and do not mind telling him of them, but who also know his attractive qualities, and who undergo with a pleasure which is always new, the irresistible seduction which he exercises around him.

Without speaking again at present of Gudin, an honest man without doubt, whose letters are all full of the most passionate affection for Beaumarchais, we will only quote two examples of that warm and lasting friendship which the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was capable of inspiring. He was on intimate terms with a distinguished officer named d'Atilly, of whom I have already spoken, and who

died, if I mistake not, lieutenant-colonel, defending the monarchy. Their friendship dated from their early youth; their dispositions and opinions were different, and not a moment of lukewarmness occurs in this friendship during thirty years, although d'Atilly's affection was as independent as it was sincere. After the Goëzman law-suit, he writes to Beaumarchais:—

"I like to speak of you, I like to repeat to what point I have been envy bent upon crying you down. The picture of your interior, that of the happiness of your wives, which I have myself witnessed, so many other details are precious to my friendship. Nothing is more common than to meet persons who are prepossessed by the charms of your Memorials. It is so pleasing for me to add to this the good opinion which all who know you completely owe to you, and which I should perhaps be the first to refuse to you, if I only half knew you; for with the heart of an honest man, you have always had the tone of a Bohemian."

The meaning of this remark of d'Atilly is explained by another sentence in his letter. "I have collected," he adds, "since I have been here, twenty of your bucolics, which prove what I say. I give a taste of them to persons of your stamp, for I doubt whether, if given to the public, your morality would be 'approved Marin.'"* It is, then, to the somewhat licentious form in which Beaumarchais invests

* It will be remembered that Marin, Beaumarchais' adversary, was censor.

his thought, above all in his songs, that d'Atilly here alludes; but his remark is not without a certain truth of a more general character, if it be applied to Beaumarchais' bearing and tone altogether; it proves at last that among his friends, frankness went side by side with affection.

One last document among a thousand, which comes naturally by the side of d'Attilly's letter, is a note addressed to Beaumarchais by an old friend, the Fermier-Général Laborde.*

"I told you, my dear friend, that I would give you the plan of a clump of trees for your charming garden, to be consecrated to the most affectionate friendship; I send it to you not doubting but that you will consent to render the last duties to a friend who looks upon still dwelling with you when he is no more, as his greatest happiness; it is not a cenotaph I ask from you, but a real tomb. Would you refuse to the remains of your friend, what you have done for the mere *souvenir* of Dupaty? I am pleased to think the contrary, that I shall inhabit your elysium when I shall have ceased to exist; that the dumb language of this monument will recall to you sometimes a recollection of a man who has always loved you since he has known you, and who, penetrated with gratitude for the kindness with which he is loaded by all that are dear to you, forms as his last wish that of reposing for ever in the place they inhabit."

Must not the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" have possessed qualities which were singularly at-

* The author of the opera of "Pandora," and Louis XV.'s former first valet-de-chambre, of whom we have already spoken.

tractive, to inspire a Fermier-Général with such an effusion of sensibility?

A charming trait of his character has been often related, but with a little inaccuracy, in reference to the inscription engraved upon the collar of his little dog. This trait having been pointed out to the public during his lifetime in a very eulogistic article, signed by Rœderer, the veteran Beaumarchais writes naïvely to the editor to thank him for his praises, and begs him to be kind enough to rectify the inscription on the collar, which had been somewhat disfigured; "For," he says, "quotations should always be made with exactness."

"I am Mademoiselle Follette; Beaumarchais belongs to me;
We live on the boulevard."

It may be said, then, after La Harpe, after Arnault, after all those who have known the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" well, that this Beaumarchais, pursued by such black calumnies, resembled in no way the portrait which his enemies have left of him. It is true that his good qualities are often somewhat concealed by levity of wit, and errors in general bearing. His friend d'Atilly has just represented him to us in his true light: "he has the heart of an honourable man, but he has often the tone of a Bohemian." The licentious frivolity of his century

has to too great an extent coloured his ideas. The serious side of life, the thought of what awaits us after our short passage here below, occupy him but slightly; and in a certain order of sentiments, in which man is distinguished from the animal only, by that gift of modesty which Châteaubriand so well names the most beautiful of all fears after that of God, we might sometimes say, that Beaumarchais does not go beyond the impulses of instinct; but to appreciate his character justly in its *ensemble*, we must allow something to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" for his position and his century. Place him now in a social medium, in which the rights of talent are fully recognised, and instead of having this somewhat forced physiognomy, in which daring, pushed to effrontery, is but the recoil from the unjust disdain offered to him, and he will have the true physiognomy of his character, enterprising, active, courageous, while fundamentally good, generous, and loyal; does this mean that it would have sufficed for Beaumarchais to breathe the air of the nineteenth century, to become a model of every virtue? We are far from professing so blind an enthusiasm for our epoch. All we mean to say is, that if Beaumarchais had lived in the present day, capable with the varied resources of his rare intelligence of making himself a high position in society, he would have appeared to us under a more imposing aspect.

Perhaps also, on the other hand, we have reason to ask if he would not have lost on one side what he gained on the other; if our time would have exercised but a happy influence upon him, if by rendering him apparently more serious, it would have rendered him fundamentally better; if it would not have induced him to replace his faults by vices, and above all by a style of hypocrisy peculiar to our epoch, and which might be called the charlatanism of dignity.

When we judge the nineteenth century by the genuises who have illustrated it, or by the *ensemble* or moral work which is taking place in its bosom, we are first of all inclined to think that it is much better than the preceding century. Its more serious physiognomy is the indication of a salutary re-action against that spirit of derision, which in the eighteenth century was found everywhere, and which, under the pretence of frankness, made a sport, as we have seen, of sentiments which are the most sacred, the most indispensable to the moral life of humanity. But if we study the effect of the more serious tastes of our time, before that portion of society which is in truth the least numerous, but which is the most bustling, and sometimes the most influential, on that portion of society which trades on the other, which intrigues, enriches itself, ruins itself, raises itself, and lowers itself, turn by turn, through speculations and revolutions, how are we to avoid perceiving that

the good tendencies of our century undergo, in certain social regions, a perversion, and that they assume therein the form of an hypocrisy of the worst kind; for this hypocrisy has not even the merit of ordinary hypocrisy, which at least takes some trouble to play its part in a suitable manner. The hypocrisy of the day is full of austerity and modesty in its public speeches, which does not prevent it being at the same time openly and frankly without shame in all its actions. It thirsts for gold: to allay this thirst it hesitates at nothing in the way of dishonour and meanness; it devotes itself ardently in the open sun to all the material enjoyments which gold procures, and to all the tumults which it encourages; but it is also in the open sun that it proclaims its profound respect for religion, disinterestedness, delicacy, and honest, upright poverty. While it embraces vice with the one hand, with the other it turns ostentatiously to virtue, and considers it has settled everything properly. In its eyes morality consists entirely in ceremonies and forms, analogous to those of "your very humble and obedient servant;" whoever rejects these forms is very culpable, but on the other hand, whoever observes them is irreproachable, and no one has the right to ask him any further questions. Is this not the kind of comedy which is noticed too often in that world which is called more

especially the world of business? This mixture of gravity in words, and effrontery in actions; the entire and openly proclaimed disagreement between what is said and what is done, are perhaps more dangerous than the licentious persiflage of the eighteenth century; for if such conduct gained ground, it would end by changing all notions of good and evil in the mind of the masses, into pure terms of convention, which imply nothing and deceive no one.

Let us now suppose Beaumarchais living among ourselves, and thrown into the tumultuous arena in which so many rival ambitions and jealousies meet. Let him continue to possess all the qualities which we have been able to recognise in him—aptitude for the most considerable and complicated affairs, activity, sagacity, perseverance. What obstacle could prevent him obtaining not only fortune, but also honour, like the others? His levity of manner? But it was the tone of his century; he could easily assume the tone of the present day. He would have more external dignity. He would perhaps not write anything for the stage, that would lower him; he would be somewhat less witty; that would compromise him. Could he be morally better? that is a question for discussion; but what appears to us certain is, that to give full development to the whole of his brilliant

faculties, to obtain everything, to figure in the history of his country, with as much fervour and brilliancy as he did with agitation and noise—all that Beaumarchais wanted was to come into the world fifty or sixty years later.

APPENDIX.

No. 17 (page 20).

To the Count Maurepas.

M. le Comte,—The affair of my unhappy friend P—— affected my heart and filled my head to such an extent the other evening, that I entirely forgot to tell you what I have the honour to write to you. You will make what use of it you wish.

If by chance the king had not yet made his choice as to the present he intends to make to the queen on the occasion of her happy accouchement, I have something at my disposal which has the triple merit of being so decidedly a royal present, that it can only suit a queen, of being perfectly unknown, and of being purchasable by annual payments, and without paying a farthing at the present moment. These three advantages appear to me to entitle this *cadeau* to a preference, if it be yet time. It is an ornament for a mantelpiece, in rock crystal, furnished, decorated, and studded all over with every possible kind of precious stone.

The centre-piece is a large fish in crystal covered with diamonds, and bearing a crystal vase enriched all over with precious stones and containing a clock, which corresponds with a set of chimes in the body of the fish: the whole is supported by crystal dolphins and placed on a slab loaded with corals, to which are suspended diamonds in pear-like shapes, of all colours, as well as rare stones tastefully mixed, such as

rubies, sapphires, emeralds, &c., with which the slab is studded; besides large pearls, which form shells to tortoises of enamel. A pedestal of white marble is the support of the whole, which is of the greatest richness, and, above all, in the best taste. Two vases of rock crystal, very richly adorned with diamonds and wreaths of precious stones, are the two side-pieces. Finally, two flambeaux, also of rock crystal, and quite as sumptuously ornamented as the remainder, complete this ornament, which is composed of five pieces.

If this slight sketch, absolutely unique of its kind, could excite the gallantry, the desire, or even the curiosity of the king, it would be taken to your house, M. le Comte, quite secretly; the king could see it just as mysteriously; and in case it should please his Majesty, it could be all placed one fine day on the queen's mantel-piece without any one suspecting it. And you know of what value ignorance and surprise are in such a case. Now you think, perhaps, from my description, that such an ornament must cost the ransom of Francis the First; but the man who has become enthusiastic about his superb composition, which he has really ventured to destine for the queen for her accouchement, is a diamond jeweller who wishes to retire from business. This is the reason why an annuity suits him. He values his ornament at more than 200,000 livres, and will part with it for less than a hundred and sixty. He consents, even after the purchase has been made, if his master-piece be not valued higher than the price he sells it for, to undergo whatever loss may be named, so sure is he of having made the finest collection of stones with the greatest economy.

I have said all I had to say. Reject or admit my idea, but do me the justice to look upon the offer and the information as a consequence of the very respectful attachment with which I am, &c.,

CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

No. 18 (page 22).

To M. Necker.

Paris, Oct. 20, 1781.

Sir,—If you are still intrusted with the enormous weight of the finances of the kingdom, I should take care, both for your sake and for mine, not to argue before you the frivolous question of a literary justification, and my pride would be your guarantee against my importunity; but you have become a private citizen, and it is, above all, now that I cannot submit to any imputation of baseness which makes me blush to the bottom of my heart.

I am accused before you, I am aware, of having allowed myself, in a light work intended for the theatre, to make jokes or sarcasms which affect you.

Receive, Sir, the declaration of a man of honour, who has never betrayed the truth, that I never at any time during your administration wrote a word, or did anything to produce an impression, which could be disagreeable to you. If I have not always approved of the substance, and above all of the form of the economical measures which you prefer, at all events I have openly and constantly admired the power and moral courage which led you to the greatest results, and I no more conceal from your friends my simple eulogy, than any critical observations. Ask M. Marmontel about the matter, he will tell you whether I am sincere; ask even your own memory, it will remind you that on every occasion, beginning with the Letellier affair, in which I certainly think you were wrong, until the matters of administration about which chance placed me in conversation with you, my steady and true disposition never failed me; but there is a great difference between this frank and loyal conduct, and the baseness of secretly annoying a great public administrator, and above all, the odious and infamous conduct of

attacking you at the present time, and disturbing a repose, which is the more respectable in my eyes, from the fact of it being with the esteem of the public, the only recompense of your immense labours.

You have hated me, persecuted me even, I am aware; and I have not ceased to render you all the justice which is your due, and to look upon you as the first example of great merit in its true place. Count de Maurepas has not forgotten that after your nomination, the first thing I said to him was: "At all events, this is the end to the reign of dull protégés; true merit is at last intrusted with administration."

I cannot suffer, then, Sir, that you and Madame Necker should look upon me as a bad man, which I am not, and I will submit, without reserve, to any of your friends you may appoint, this comedy of mine, which is about to appear, and if it be found to contain a single word which can have the slightest reference to you, I consent to have the work instantly thrown into the fire.

A light satire of some of the faults common to men in general, surrounded by plenty of gaiety, ought to find favour with all sound minds. This I take to be the object of comedy; but dramatic writing was not intended to degenerate into personal satire, and I should think myself doubly guilty if I were to give such an example at the expense of a great man.

I owe this justification to the genuine esteem and respectful consideration with which I have always been, and with which I am proud to be, more than ever, Sir,

Your very humble, &c.,

(Signed) CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

I take the liberty of presenting my respectful homage to Madame Necker. I cannot recal to mind, without being extremely moved, how much use she made of your power to benefit suffering humanity.

No. 19 (page 24).

To Monseigneur the Keeper of the Seals.

Paris, June 1, 1786.

Monseigneur,—I cannot resist a feeling which leads me to importune you; but I have my heart and my head full of the good action you have just performed. I must yield to it, and thank you, as persons thank God for having restored life to the most honest, the most virtuous, of deserving men, the poor, the amiable, the worthy Dupaty. His other friends and I did not know what to do for him; it is certain he would have died in a short time. Your short letter, but full of frank benevolence, has snatched him from a most dreadful situation.

May you, in your afflictions, Monseigneur, meet with as much consolation as you have just procured for all his friends, and they are numerous, because few men unite, as he does, virtues of a most austere description with the brilliant qualities of a most cultivated mind. No one knows better than myself, how odious the persecution is that he has suffered. I passed four months of the past year at Bourdeaux, in the centre of the absurd feelings, which from that time subjected him to the deep grief from which your justice has relieved him.

Finish this worthy work, and receive beforehand the thanks of a number of feeling persons, in whose name I am, with the most respectful gratitude, Monseigneur,

Your very humble and very obedient servant,

(Signed) BEAUMARCHAIS.

No. 20 (page 34).

Letter from the Countess Fanny de Beauharnais to Beaumarchais.

Although I have not the advantage of being known to you, Sir, a mind such as yours has too great a claim to esteem for my confidence to surprise you. The energy which characterises you honours the age, as well as justifies the step that I have taken; and believe me, in this age of egotism and pusillanimity you only, Sir, can restore me to hope. A suffering, unfortunate friend, worthy of a different fate, a friend whom grief overwhelms (may friendship save him), is the object of my letter. And, above all, do not think that he is in fault: his position would only be more sad; my zeal would not be less active. I know he has sufficient virtues to redeem many faults, but this zeal on my part is a duty, and not a mere act. M. Dorat, I do not fear to name to you, one of your most sincere admirers, and a man who deserves the greatest interest in the world, without having anything to reproach himself with, a victim to a cruel reverse, by one of those events which cannot be foreseen, by the bankruptcy of a bookseller, whose embarrassments his feelings made him wish to bear, after having satisfied everybody, is now in such frightful distress, and in such uneasiness of mind, that his health is impaired, grief is consuming him, and a friend trembling even for his life, dares, Sir, without knowing you, confide to your honour her anxious fears. No, no, never will you meet with more gratitude, or with a better opportunity of exercising the nobleness and generosity of your feelings; but, alas! Sir, it is only a sum of 20,000 francs which can relieve him from this crisis. He would repay it in six years, three thousand and some hundred livres yearly. His probity will assure you of his exactitude. Honour, and all that is sacred to a feeling heart, requires no other security. But I will give them if it

is necessary. My God, there is nothing that I would not sign to verify an act of the greatest service you can ever have performed. And if it is impossible for you to lend this sum, in case you will have the goodness to become security, I will undertake, Sir, to remit it to him.

Oh! how can I tell you what joy I should feel in informing M. Dorat that his troubles are finished! Calm security, the sweet sentiment of gratitude, will succeed the most painful agitations. I conjure you at least, if some unheard of, unexpected fatality should prevent what I cannot expect, but from a most feeling heart, to inclose in it the secret and the misfortunes of a very valued friend. I acknowledge, Sir, that a refusal in such urgent circumstances would so much affect me, that to lessen it, if that is possible, it would be better that you should give the answer to my letter to a mutual friend, who will speak to you about it. This friend is very amiable, and appreciates you. I have the honour to be, Sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

LA COMTESSE DE BEAUHARNAIS.

No. 21 (page 139).

Letter from the President Dupaty to Beaumarchais.

You are very kind to have sent me a ticket for a *loge*, but I very much doubt if I can make use of it, seeing I go with persons who are suspected, who have their reasons for not showing themselves in public; that is to say—for on this head I must explain myself with you—with a mother and her daughters. If, then, your ticket is not for the *rez de chaussée*, where persons are not seen, your ticket cannot be of use to me. You might, however, in that case, change it for a ticket for the *rez de chaussée;* there are persons who wish for nothing better than to show themselves. I send you back the ticket, and beg of you to do me the pleasure,

the great pleasure, of arranging everything to the satisfaction of these ladies.

Accept, I pray you, my regards.

Answer of Beaumarchais to Dupaty.

I have no consideration, Monsieur le President, for women who allow themselves to see a play which they consider indelicate, provided only they see it in secret. I cannot countenance such fantasies. I have given my piece to the public to amuse and instruct it, and not to give simperers the pleasure of thinking well of it in a private box, and speaking ill of it in society. The pleasures of vice with the honours of virtue! such is the prudery of the age.

My piece is not a work of an equivocal nature; you must admit this, or avoid it. I salute you, and keep my box:

(Signed) BEAUMARCHAIS.

March 10, 1784.

No. 22 (page 139).

Diderot's Letters to Mademoiselle Voland, Vol. 2, p. 411.

I can tell Madam Legendre that those who only knew Madame d'Holbach from the word of M. Suard, did not know her at all, because M. Suard was not paid to speak well of her. I saw, and I saw, I think, rightly, that M. Suard had had the rudeness to injure the baroness in the mind of his friend. These, then, are what are called worthy people. They are admitted into a house, the master of the house loads them with attention and kind services, esteems them, is friendly with them, and gives them every imaginable proof of it; as a recompense they use every means to corrupt his wife, and when they do not succeed, they do worse than hang the woman.

The same work, Vol. 2, p. 433.

I have profited by the opportunity I had of writing to Suard, to give him a sharp rebuke. You know, or you do not know, that he had the indiscretion to send me under a loose envelope an English book full of infamous prints. I have endeavoured to make him understand the possible consequences of his action—the corruption of my daughter, and my eternal hatred. These are the people who carry in their pocket the balances by which they measure so strictly the works of others and their acts; and here is one of them who runs a chance of destroying his friend with grief, and who does what a puppy of fifteen, who had to send such a work to Rue Froid Manteau to a courtezan, would not have done from self-respect.

No. 23 *bis* (page 143).

Letter from Feydel to Beaumarchais.

Paris, Aug. 11, 1784.

Sir,—Some days since, not knowing what to turn to, I thought of writing to an academician and philosopher to conjure him to procure me a place as librarian, secretary, or preceptor, after having examined me. He replied to me that he was obliged to find places for several young men who had been recommended to him by persons of distinction.

The next day I wrote to a religious academician. He replied that nothing was easier than to throw myself into the arms of Providence. The next day a financier kept me four hours talking in one of the stalls of the Honoré, where he had gone to purchase books, and to sell some. I ascertained his name, and wrote to him. He sent me a crown to prove, as he said in his answer, how much interest he took in suffering honesty.

The next day I took this crown back to its master, with a letter in which I thanked him as much as I could, and went to the market place to sell a shirt. The next day I wrote to a man in office, to whom chance had once given me the opportunity of being useful. I begged him to make me a clerk in a small office. He sent me a very polite answer by a servant, begging me to call upon him the next day.

The next day I went to his house. His reception was as gracious as his letter; but a visit which he received a few minutes afterwards forced me to withdraw, and doubtless made him forget what reasons had induced me to come.

The next day I bent my steps towards the Rue Saint Jacques, with the intention of seeking a situation as printer's reader. I went through this and the neighbouring streets, but had not strength enough to overcome my timidity, and returned without having spoken to anybody. Yesterday I went to the porter des Saints Innocents, and begged him to let me a shop which is under the Porte des Charniers by the Rue aux Fers. He answered that these shops were not to let and that the rector gave them to clerks who had good protection.

This morning I thought of making preparations for the other world, when I remembered that it was nearly two months since I had read the papers. I took my four sous to the Pont Notre Dame, and read in the "Journal de Paris," for the 4th of August, a letter signed Caron de Beaumarchais, and I felt my eyes moisten. To-day, Sir, I have the honour to write to you: it is not money I ask of you, but occupation of any kind. If you wish for proofs of my respectability, I can give you some which are unequivocal.

If you do not grant my request, I beg of you to send back my letter, under cover, as an answer; but I also beg of you to add a ticket of admission for "The Marriage of Figaro," that I may at least have the satisfaction of having one more good laugh before my leap from the Pont Royal.

I have the honour to be with respect, Sir, your very humble and obedient, FEYDEL, ECUER, CHEZ M. CHAGOT.

Limmodier, Rue de la Vanniere,
Quartier de la Grève.

No. 23 (page 152).

Au Sieur Caron de Beaumarchais.

800,000 liv. *Exercice*, 1786, Fo. 707.

The keeper of my royal treasure has been ordered to pay Sieur Caron de Beaumarchais, in ready money, the sum of 800,000 livres, which I have decreed him by my decision of the 5th of February, this month, for indemnification and payment of all losses, and which the changes of destination have caused the merchant fleet and commerce of Sieur de Beaumarchais, during the year 1778, and the first month of 1779. This present, with the receipt of the said Sieur de Beaumarchais, being a renunciation of every ulterior demand for the said sum of 800,000 livres will be employed, on the first acquittance of the accountant, which will be expedited by certification to the discharge of the said Savalette de Langes. Done at Versailles the 12th February, 1786.

Accountant of the Royal Treasury.

BON.

(Signed) LOUIS.

No. 24 (page 220).

To Monsieur de Crosne, Lieutenant of Police.

Paris, May 13, 1789.

Sir,—You requested me to write what I had the honour to say to you yesterday morning. The recent remembrance of a frightful and public evil renders uneasiness excusable, when danger menaces us again; to punish crime and excess is the duty of law and magistrates;

to warn them of it, is that of the *autority surveillante;* and one cannot remember without grief that a house guarded by 400 bayonets has been burnt in open day.

This problem, which remains to be solved, greatly increases the uneasiness of some citizens, who have been menaced. I am one of them, and this is what I have seen.

All the workmen of buildings meet on certain days at a fixed time; when they are seen assembling in the evening in unfrequented places, something is being prepared. I have observed this several evenings; in one of these groups I heard these words: "A good many more will be killed before next week." One of my friends heard these words from one: "We must work in the night."

The fishwomen in the cemetery of Saint-Jacques were speaking aloud, in the open market, a few days ago, of my houses as *devoted places.*

An infamous fellow named Michelin, lodges in this market, at the corner of the Rue de la Verrerie, at a porter's on the second floor.

This man, who played the part of a false witness in my last law-suit, paid by my enemies, and justly suspected of having placarded my doors, and broken my bas-reliefs, is one of those who exite the mob against me. These blind tools of secret vengeance, once put in motion, follow without any examination where wickedness leads them.

I had the honour, Sir, when speaking to you, to add, that if the surveillance did not slacken during this apparent tranquillity, my advice would be useless; but that, if security produced carelessness, there would be a risk of being surprised by new attempts.

Accept kindly this advice, dictated by my zeal, and by my solicitude, and do me the justice to believe me with the most respectful devotion, Sir,

Your very humble servant,

(Signed) CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

No. 25 (page 246).

To the Actors at the Opera assembled.

April 3, 1793.

Brothers and sisters, or rather sisters and brothers; honour to the fair sex.

It is a good idea to mix the two kinds, to increase the receipts—the grand *opera*, and the *opera* which is spoken and sung.

With the superb accessories of your presence, we have no rival to fear.

But it is in a new kind of talent in which you ought to perfect yourselves. The habit of constant singing injures the *débit* of the comedy, and its length spoils the effect, particularly in gay comedy.

The sole wish to be useful to your stage has made me overcome the repugnance I had to busy myself about anything but beating all the dogs who bark at me. I went to see the second performance of "The Marriage," and the following are my observations. More movement and variety is required on your stage. Putting aside the self-love of the author, I have united the third with the fourth act; there will be less comedy, and the singing will be *rapproché*, the piece will be shorter, and a splendid ballet for the wedding will be a good end to "The Marriage." The style of the piece shows pretty well of what description the ballet ought to be. It should be less in the style of French dances, than in the lively and *grenadin* of the Moors, for which the Spanish have preserved a taste, a *noce du Gamache à peu près*. You deprive your play of one of its greatest attractions, if there is an interruption between singing, declamation, and dancing; do not neglect this advice.

I found the other acts rather empty. As every act begins with words, there is nothing so chilling as to go on the stage

and talk while the public is getting weary. You must have grand and fine orchestral music to fill up these long intervals, and to make a variety. This remark is essential.

Between the first and second acts, I should wish for a *désordonnée* rehearsal of some lively ballet, which should be like the rehearsals *du foyer*. Mutiny amongst the actresses, the anger of the *maître-de-ballet*, the laughter of some young dancers, pieces begun and not finished, general impatience, which would lead to a kind of *farandole*, &c.—this kind of ballet would belong to this *folle journée*, and would seem to prepare them for the fête imagined by "Figaro."

If you do not make an effort to enliven the piece, you had better abandon it.

Etre piquant ou nul; c'est là votre devise.

As to the scenes which are spoken, I require Bartholo, who is quite up to his part, to dwell less upon the commencement, and to whip more up his first scene with Marceline, with the *brusquerie* of an old man, always in a passion.

I require Spinette, who plays the part of Susanna very merrily, to make a contrast to Marceline's temper in the scene of their debate in the first act, by a light and refined irony. One of the charms in this scene is, that one laughs while the other gets angry. Let us leave sourness to old age, since it is the age of regrets.

I found the little page rather *dégingandé;* he ought to be either *naïf* or *polisson;* this is easy to repair.

Count Almaviva will play the comedy very well; I must only request him to distinguish the nobleness of the character which he represents from the *échassure;* otherwise his part is very good.

In Figaro's there are only a few changes to make in the positions on the stage, which will impart more finesse to his character,—this will be the work of a moment at rehearsal. I beg of him to reflect, like a clever man as he is, that the

slightest overdoing may give the character of a farce to this piece; for Figaro is a *mauvais sujet*, witty, knowing, refined, and not a hoaxer. For the rest, there is nothing to be said about the vivacity of the *débit*.

I beg Basile to speak out, and not to rest on every syllable as if he were singing verses. The scene of the little page in the *fauteuil* he makes by far too languid; that is not comedy. Forget the theatre; the scene passes in a room.

If you adopt these ideas the piece will be reinvigorated, and you will then encourage men of merit to work for you. I will then do the impossible to hear you rehearse in private, with the holiest desire to contribute, if I can, to multiply the successes of the first theatre in the world.

(Signed) BEAUMARCHAIS.

I have said nothing of the Countess, who has all the comeliness of her part; one would like sometimes a little more animation.

No. 26 (page 283).

Unpublished Note from Beaumarchais upon Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

I, who am no hypocrite, have long troubled myself to know truly whether Jean-Jacques was an enthusiast in favour of virtue, or nothing but a boaster. His great works have taught me nothing. I have read several times his "Confessions," which are very weakly, very unevenly written, and I think I know him very well; one doubt alone remained to me; it was as to whether he would have had the courage to accuse himself, boldly as he has done, of many acts of baseness, and even to raise such as the abandoning of his children, the

calumnious accusation against a poor servant of a theft which he had committed himself, the abandoning of his music-master in the middle of a street in Lyons, when he was in an epileptic fit, and many other acts of mean cowardice. The question I wish to solve, referring to his own confession, is whether with a degree of virtue equal to that which he attributes to himself, and which I grant him, he would have the courage to accuse himself publicly, unless he had thought himself protected by his high reputation: if, in a word, in case he had been considered as an ordinary writer. This question is worth treating fundamentally. I will do so impartially. I have made an objection which I do not wish to forget. Can one of the actions of Jean-Jacques' life be taken as a model of conduct and judgment for a sensible man? As for me, I confess I should have thought myself below the dullest mediocrity if I had behaved, like him, in what he relates of himself, other things being equal. He was a poor devil who had genius, or rather a genius, but one who had neither conduct nor character: all his life is a proof of this to me.

No. 27 (page 299).

To Collin d'Harleville, who gave me a Copy of his allegorical Poem on Melpomene and Thalie.

Paris Ventose 14 year 7 (March 4, 1799).

To read a pleasing poem, amuse one's self with a charming work, it is necessary, my dear citizen, to have the heart serene, the head free; and very few of those moments are reserved for old age! Formerly, I wrote in order to give pleasure; and now, after forty years' labour, I write in order to dispute my bread with those who have robbed my family of it.

Que d'excellents chevaux je vois mourir aux fiacres!

But I confess I am somewhat like the "Claire" of Jean-

Jacques, from whom, even through her tears, a laugh sometimes escaped. I know that the mind requires relaxation, and I have given myself a very agreeable one of reading your two manners of treating life—the presumed careers of Melpomene and Thalie.

The first thing which struck me after the graces of your style, was the goodness of your nature. Many writers would have seen in it simply an opportunity for the exercise of satirical talent; the two muses of the stage presented a fine canvass for it! You, while rendering to each what was due to him, have not said anything to offend either the living or the memory of the dead, while making us love the writer who instructs while he amuses us.

The careers of the two sisters are full of felicitous verses. Those in which you make Æschylus descend into the arena to fight Sophocles are very fine.

. . . . . Il est vaincu.
Malheureux! . . . *D'un seul jour il avait trop vécu.* (Vers parfait.)
Il fuit; la jeune élève, excusable peut-être,
Préféra pour époux son amant à son maître.

The two first tragic writers are classed.

I take at random several verses from the number of those which struck me the most; in Thomas Corneille, for example:

Faible émule sans doute et rival téméraire,
Mais qui serait fameux s'il n'eût pas eu de frère.

You are treating him very favourably.
And with regard to his justly celebrated brother:

Ces Romains, ces héros qu'il aime à rappeler,
Sont plus grands, plus Romains, quand il les fait parler.

And Racine. . . . Racine! with what a perfection of style, to drive imitators to despair. . . .

C'est l'âme d'*Euripide* et la voix de *Virgile.*

And the death of Voltaire, who said in his box, the day he was crowned, "You wish them to cause my death!"

Si son âme s'exhale en ces touchants adieux,
Plus encor que les ans, sa joie en est la cause,
Ce n'est point une mort, c'est une apothéose. (Beau vers.)

The animated tone of Thalie contrasts happily with the majestic tone of her sister. Your short, compact verses, give her her true characteristics.

With regard to the *Festin de Pierre,* stupidly so called by the French in translation of *Il convivo di Pietra* (sic), *le convive de Pierre,* which is its real title, the two following verses:—

D'un homme on peut prendre l'habit;
Mais lui vole-t-on sa manière?

are not spoilt by those of Voltaire in his *Etrennes aux sots.*

Le lourd *Crévier,* pédant, crasseux et vain,
Prend hardiment la place de Rollin.

I say of you,

Il est beau d'être bon, à côté d'un tel homme!

And our good La Fontaine placed close to Molière, with a perception equally delicate and correct: like a valet who takes his master's coat.

D'analyser le cœur humain,
Entre eux se partageaient la pomme;
Mais l'*inimitable bon homme*
Avait pris un autre chemin.

Well—very well.

In the preamble of a tale in which I had, rightly enough,

placed the fables in the first rank of his work, I had permitted myself to say:—

Mais garda-t-il son mérite infini,
Quand il mêla, dans un conte érotique,
Les vers du siècle au jargon marotique?
Mélange ingrat qui le rend inégal,
Et singulier, bien plus qu'original, etc., etc.

Then, astonished at the blasphemy which had escaped me, I returned to my senses and said to him:

Mais, ô mon maître! excuse un badinage.
De ton disciple accepte un pur hommage.
Nul plus que moi n'ai senti tes beautés;
Tes vers naïfs et jamais imités, etc.

I am proud at having defined like yourself, *cet inimitable bonhomme*.

You have done much honour to Destouches, the cold Destouches; for you to name him after Molière, there was scarcely anything to say of him, but that

C'était une large manière,
Un air digne, un noble regard. . . . .

And de Boissy? . . .

Et l'enjoûment du *Babillard*
La divertit sans la séduire. . . . .

. . . is very pretty. Never the least bitterness; this is well. What you say about the comic writers of England is very just.

Ces Anglais ont, dans leur gaîté,
Et surtout dans la raillerie,
Un fiel mordant, *une âcreté*
Insupportable, en vérité!
Quand les Français on a goûté
Le sel et la plaisanterie. . . . .

The criticism would have been perfect and approved of by every one: if, that with all their defects, they have taught us *to be daring*, to quit, to some extent, the beaten path of our French monotony, in which, too often, the first scene enables us to guess the last.

But what has troubled me the most has been that in making such grave complaints against "Fabre," you have rendered full justice to the finest of his pieces, to "Philinte." . . . When he read it to me at my house, I said to him with naïve anger: "How can you claim your turn for other works, when you have had the happiness to write this one?" He replied to me: "But it will kill the other." "Well, Sir, it will be only a suicide; people are not hanged for that."

Adieu.—I wish, however, to make one observation, which I spare to no one I esteem. I have the right to make it; I, the printer of "Voltaire!" After what he has taught, do you think it advisable to let the imperfects of our verbs be printed with *oi?* Look at the face a foreigner makes, when he is told that the word *connoissois* should be pronounced *connaissais;* that *François* and *Anglois* rhyme with *Portugais*, and not with *Suédois, Angoumois, Artois*, &c. These barbarisms of our Gothic printers ought no longer to be tolerated; living authors have alone the right of opposing them; for the dead have no complaints to make against those who reprint them.

Adieu.—I have no doubt that you will be granted the indulgence you request of the Muses in these verses:—

> Muses, du moins je réclame la vôtre:
> Heureux surtout, trop heureux si, pour prix
> Du grain d'encens qu'à toutes deux j'offris,
> L'une de vous me recommande à l'autre!

And why not, *bon homme?* Women never refuse what they are asked in so pleasing a manner, unless, however, it happens that one belongs to those who sign like myself, *le vieux bon homme,*

CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

Unpublished Answer from Collin d'Harleville.

Paris, October 25.

It was not until the day before yesterday, dear and respected *confrère*, that your letter was remitted to me by the amiable Demoustier. I had just arrived from the country, where I had been ten days galloping (not on Pegasus) from the banks of the Oise to the laughing valley of Emile. The perusal of your kind and interesting epistle instantly revived me. I was, however, somewhat deceived in my expectations. A letter of four pages led me to expect more critical remarks; and finding verses mixed up with the prose, I hoped to find a greater number of yours. The first are very severe for our *bon homme*, but the end makes up for everything. How can one be long angry with good Lafontaine? I would forgive your severity towards the tales more easily than your excessive indulgence for my little poem. I will not, however, lay too much stress on this point, it is so pleasant to be praised by one's masters. The style of Melpomene is not familiar to me, and that must be my excuse in the eyes of censors; but I have thought, or rather I have felt, that it was impossible to love one of the two Muses without taking an affectionate interest in the other; if I might be allowed to make use of a comparison which would appear too familiar, I would say that the other is, as it were, a sister-in-law. See for the rest how the author of the "Misanthrope" approximates to the style and tone of Corneille, *interdum atollit comœdia vocem*, and the good Corneille, in his finest passage, is often as natural and as *naïf* as Molière. Since I have named Corneille, I will make a confession: it is that I am not pleased with what I have said of this great poet; I should perhaps have said simply—

> Mais elle a mis ailleurs son amour et sa gloire,
> Corneille est à ses pieds,

and have stopped there.

I admit that I have treated his brother rather too well, and also Destouches; as for Racine, I have spoken of him with affection, which is all I need say. I am quite of your opinion as to the justice I should render to the dramatic boldness of the English; and I am the more inexcusable from the fact that I was full of their theatre. For the last few years, Young, Pope, Shakspeare, and above all, Sterne, are almost the only authors I read. Accordingly, melancholy has stifled in me the little *vis comica* which animated me. Shall I confess it? if I had to begin again, I should devote myself to what I was born for, to singing the praises of Gardens and Woods. Delille has not put a gardener or husbandman into his, and it is a pity; I will put one, and it should be my father or myself, who inhabit the country during eight months of the year; who read and reread the Georgics of Virgil and Gesner without ceasing; but I cannot, I dare not write after them. We have other dramatic authors, who, when they have passed the best years of their lives arranging scenes, can do nothing else. I above all was only as much of a poet, at the utmost, to the extent that enabled me to make my different characters speak; and I congratulated myself upon it as making me happily incapable of producing tirades and portraits, and of making me think of myself. All that was very well in comedy, if only for gentle graceful comedies; but it would not be enough for describing the beauties of nature; one must then be contented with feeling them.

But here I am wandering, and far from Melpomene and Thalie: this is only a slight misfortune; but gratitude and pleasure bring me back to you, my dear *confrère*—all your obliging remarks, your kind quotations; and nevertheless there will be some reason for entertaining the *amour propre*, if I understood it all to the letter. I recognise your prepossession in my favour, and that all causes me a very pure and very sincere pleasure in bringing myself into relation with a man who has

served my darling Muse so often and so well. If I wished to avenge myself, and quote in my turn all that pleases me and charms me in his works, I should have enough to do; but I think I have a correct opinion of him, when I express my conviction that he will be more gratified by the utterance of my high esteem and my unvarying affection.

COLLIN HARLEVILLE.

P.S.—I condemn the *ois*, &c., but I have not been able to make my printer reasonable, who is otherwise an excellent man; and I should be happy if there were no other faults in my work.

May I venture to beg that you will present my respects to Madame de Beaumarchais? Deign to inspire her with a little indulgence in my favour. I am afraid my uncouthness displeased her. This would be enough to distress me for a long time, or, much better, to cure me of the spleen.

No. 28 (page 312).

To the Citizen François de Neufchâteau, Minister of the Interior.

Paris, Fructidor 1 year 6.

Citizen Minister,—Amongst the ameliorations we have a right to hope for from your return to the ministry of the Interior, there exists a discovery, to which I invite your serious attention. One of the most majestic ideas in discoveries which has honoured our century, is certainly the *ascension of heavy bodies in the light fluid of the air;* but our nation, which is only momentarily infatuated with the finest of discoveries, has soon made nothing but child's play out of the one calculated to change the face of the globe more than that of the compass, if people would seriously occupy themselves with raising the idea to the point of aërial navigation. The

unfortunate experiment at St. Cloud, of the balloon ascent of the Duke de Chartres, with the Roberts, the professors of physics; that still more unfortunate one of the young Pilâtre des Rosiers, in another balloon, retarded the art by twenty years. Balloons, I say, and always balloons! Can spherical bodies be directed? An enlightened thinker communicated to me an idea which he had conceived for directing in the atmosphere ships without weight, but under the elongated form of fish, to which the æronaut is to be assimilated. Scientific men contested the possibility of this direction being given, with the thoughtless objection that there is no supporting point in the air; although every one sees birds of all size rise, support themselves, direct themselves, and travel through the air in every way, notwithstanding their weight—the lightest of them being heavier than an ærial vessel one hundred feet long, since the latter can be put into equilibrium with the air which it displaces. This reasoning, worthy of a musketeer, irritated me with our *savans;* but while they were discouraging the æronaut, M. Scott, I encouraged him myself by printing what he had written, to assure to him, at least, the honour of his fine invention, by giving publicity to its date.

The Revolution came; I lost sight of M. Scott, and thought he had been swallowed up by it; as for myself, proscribed during four years, I abandoned the idea of navigating in the air, forced as I was to drag myself along the miry roads of the north of Upper Germany.

Finally, recalled to my post by the justice of the government, chance made me find my ærial navigator again. I revived his courage, which had been beaten down by misfortunes without number, although my own were not less! His ideas were ripened by years of reflection; they appeared to me worthy of being offered to the first authorities. I have almost forced him to write a new Memorial, to address it without any patron to the Executive Directory; so that if

the Memorial was referred to you, he would find a patron for his idea in yourself.

Ah! citizen, let us not always allow ideas, which germinate with us, be perfected by usurping Englishmen; let us profit by this one ourselves; let it do honour to your ministry; its author, with a modesty worthy of your benevolence, solicits a commission; appoint the members according to your choice. The citizen Périer the elder, a great engineer, my friend, has the same opinion as myself of the merit of this discovery; many good scientific men are of our opinion. May I prevail upon you, minister, to cast a critical glance upon the more extended Memorial which Citizen Scott is completing, before referring it to any one? It would be a handsome encouragement for him. He will have the honour to present it to you with a few more words from myself: he is too modest for me to venture to intrust him with a letter in which I say so much good of him. I address the present one to you in a straightforward manner, delighted to have an opportunity of recalling to your memory a man who has always had the greatest esteem for your talents—who honours your person—places his hope in your wise views, in the important post to which our happiness brings you back.

CARON BEAUMARCHAIS.

The Minister of the Interior to Citizen Caron Beaumarchais.

Paris, Fructidor 4 year 6.

Citizen,—I am very grateful for all the obliging things you were kind enough to say to me, and I beg you to receive my thanks. I have always been surprised that scientific men have not applied themselves to deriving from ærostats results more useful to mankind, that so fine a discovery should so long have remained in its infancy, and that we should, so to speak, have left to foreigners the glory of perfecting an inven-

tion which was due to us. It is true that hitherto the attempts have not been encouraging. I hope Citizen Scott may be more fortunate; the portrait you draw of this *savant* increases the desire I feel to see the Memorial you speak of; you may feel assured that I shall read it with interest.

Greeting and fraternity,

FRANÇOIS DE NEUFCHATEAU.

To the Citizen François de Neufchâteau, Minister of the Interior.

Paris, Fructidor 4 year 6.

Citizen Minister,—This letter will be given to you by Citizen Scott, inventor of what appears to me to be the only method of directing those æro-ambulant vessels, the first models of which were named ærostats, by a peculiarity belonging to our nation alone, which consists in always applying to new inventions names which express just the contrary of what they are; for there is nothing less static than that which the air causes to move about as vaguely as itself. I do not ask you to favour Citizen Scott personally, but to insure the success of his views, if you have the same opinion as myself of their utility. Ah, citizen, worthy it would be of your wisdom to oppose any man on horseback who would prostitute, with great danger, the discovery of ærial vessels, to the stupid amusement of the idle persons in this city. Let an accident happen to the rider or the horse, or to both, as well as to those whom their fall may crush, and universal horror will put off what is now projected for fifty years, that is to say, ærial navigation. No capitalist will then add his money to the genius of the inventor, and rival nations, looking upon us with contempt, will say everything which is invented in their country is turned to abuse.

The only man, Minister, who is not a charlatan of wild experiments, is Citizen Scott, an old officer of reputation, who brings you a long Memorial on his useful discovery.

I salute you, honour you, and love you,

CARON BEAUMARCHAIS.

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